

November 2016 • Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

BULLETIN 2

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This bulletin is for members of the SWP only. It should not be distributed or forwarded to others

GUIDE TO SWP NATIONAL CONFERENCE 6-8 JANUARY, LONDON

WELCOME TO pre-conference bulletin 2. Please read the contributions, take part in the discussion and, if you want, contribute to one of the forthcoming pre-conference bulletins. We want our conference to be a democratic event in which comrades can fully participate.

Whether you have joined recently or been a member for years, you should feel able to join the debates and put forward your views.

Branches should make arrangements to enable all members to be part of the conference discussion, and to make it possible for any member to put themselves forward as a delegate.

The SWP annual conference will take place on Friday 6, Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 January in London. Registration starts at 5pm on Friday 6 January. The conference finishes at 4.30pm on Sunday 8 January.

The pre-conference discussion period, according to the party's constitution, begins three months before that. It therefore started on 6 October.

Pre-conference bulletins

The main method of discussion is through the pre-conference bulletins (PCBs) where comrades can send in their views, their experiences, their proposals and their ideas. These bulletins are for members only and should not be shared outside the party.

Deadlines

Any SWP member may write for the PCBs. The deadline for the final one will be:

Monday 5 December, 5pm

Please keep contributions for the PCBs as short as possible (see word limits below) and send them to conference@swp.org.uk. Comrades who send a contribution will receive an acknowledgement from the National Office within three working days. If the National Office has not acknowledged your contribution please contact us as soon as possible.

Word limits

The following word limits apply:

- In PCB1 comrades may have their names attached to pieces with a total word count of up to 4,000 words. This includes any pieces with multiple signatories.
- The main CC contribution in PCB1, which sets out proposals for the general perspective of the party, may be up to 6,000 words. Other contributions by the CC are limited to 4,000 words.
- In PCB2 and PCB3 comrades may have their names attached to pieces with a total word count of up to 3,000 words. This includes any pieces with multiple signatories.
- CC contributions in PCB2 and PCB3 may be up to 4,000 words.

- The national secretaries may make minor modifications to contributions, request that they be rewritten in part or in their entirety, or refuse publication where they are libellous, endanger the safety or future employment of comrades, or contain information likely to lead to legal problems for the party or its members.
- The national secretaries may reject contributions that have appeared or are due to appear elsewhere, whether in print publications or online.

Pre-conference district meetings ("aggregates")

These meetings, open to all SWP members from the district, are where delegates to SWP Conference are elected. They are also a chance for every member to discuss our perspectives. The meeting dates will be circulated in Party Notes. In addition each registered member will receive notification of their meeting.

As in previous years, the only members who can be elected as delegates and take part in voting in aggregates are those who joined before Monday 31 October, the closing date for IB2. Anyone who joins after that is welcome to attend the aggregates, speak etc, but they can't vote or be a delegate.

Conference procedures

The main method of discussion at conference is through what we call commissions. These are documents drawn up at the end of conference sessions which summarise the main strands of discussion and any action to be taken. These can be amended. And if there is more than one view in the discussion then there can be alternative commissions which are then voted on.

This method is democratic, transparent, flexible and open to the input of delegates. It means that the very latest developments and the insights and arguments that appear in the debate can be reflected in the party's decisions.

Commissions allow delegates to listen to the experiences from the rest of the party, consider the arguments put forwards and then make decisions. However it is not a method that people are used to for trade union or student union conferences. We will make sure it is fully and repeatedly explained at the conference.

We also want districts to hold meetings after delegates are elected to introduce them to the way conference works and to deal with any questions in an unhurried atmosphere.

Sometimes there's a need for more specific debates. These can usually take the form of commissions or amendments to commissions. But they may also take the form of motions.

The procedure for motions to conference is:

- All motions must be passed in time for them to appear in one of the Pre-Conference Bulletins so that everyone is aware of them in advance. That means the final date for the submission of motions is the closing date for PCB3: 5pm, Monday 5 December.

- They must be passed by at least one properly-organised meeting of an SWP branch, or fraction, or district, or aggregate or the NC or the CC.
- Motions must be circulated well in advance (at least seven days) to allow comrades time to consider them.
- Motions to conference cannot be discussed outside the pre-conference period.
- All amendments to motions must be in by 9am on Friday 16 December. They must go through the same process as for motions - passed by a properly organised meeting and with sufficient notice given.
- All motions and amendments should be sent to conference@swp.org.uk Comrades who send a motion or amendment will receive an acknowledgement from the National Office within three working days. If the National Office has not acknowledged your contribution please contact us as soon as possible.

National Committee (NC)

Every year at SWP annual conference delegates elect a National Committee of 50 members. The party's constitution says, "The National Committee assists the Central Committee in providing political leadership for the party and reviews the party's political and organisational work between conferences. Its decisions are binding on the Central Committee. In the event of a major disagreement between the Central Committee and the National Committee, the NC has the right to call a special conference. The NC normally meets every two months between annual conferences."

Those elected to the NC also attend party councils and party conference by right. We call for nominations for the NC in pre-conference bulletins 1 and 2.

All nominations must be received by 5pm on Monday 5 December (the deadline for pre-conference bulletin 3). Do not wait to the last minute to do this.

A full list of nominations will be published in advance of conference. This will give delegates time to decide who they wish to elect. We will circulate a nomination form with pre-conference bulletins 1 and 2. If you wish to stand, please fill it in and return it to the National Office or email the required information to conference@swp.org.uk

Each nomination has to be supported by five comrades, and the nominee has to agree to be nominated. Candidates have to be registered members of the SWP and up to date with their subs (this also applies to the comrades nominating the candidate).

Each candidate should submit up to 50 words explaining why they should be on the NC. Please do not submit more than 50 words (last year the longest one submitted was 112 words – it had to be cut).

Central Committee (CC)

The CC consists of members elected by the conference according to the following procedure:

The outgoing Central Committee selects and circulates a provisional slate for the new CC at the beginning of the period for pre-conference discussion. This is then discussed at the district aggregates where comrades can propose alternative slates.

At the conference the outgoing CC proposes a final slate (which may have changed as a result of the pre-conference discussion). This slate, along with any other that is supported by a minimum of five delegates, is discussed and voted on by conference.

Between conferences the CC is entrusted with the political leadership of the organisation and is responsible for the national direction of all political and organisational work, subject to the decision-making powers of Conference.

Childcare

The question of childcare is an important one for all comrades, but particularly for women. Given we live in a society where the ruling ideas say that women are expected to bear the main burden of looking after children, it is women who are hit hardest when there is no consideration of this issue.

It is very difficult to provide a full crèche on the Marxism 2016 model for conference. At Marxism we use a combination of the (legally required) trained childcare workers and volunteers. It's hugely expensive but we do it because we recognise that it's necessary.

The cost is simply too high for us to provide that level of crèche for every party event. But depending on the age/situation of the child involved, the delegate's district could make provision to help, or a comrade could bring a friend to look after the child and be provided with a room at the event and some assistance, or the child could stay with someone else in London.

None of this is ideal, but it's possible to sort out such issues. They have worked at recent conferences.

Access

The conference venue is fully accessible. If there are any other needs that delegates require, please contact the National Office and we will seek to help.

All pre-conference discussion should take place through the PCBs, the aggregates and the party's democratic structures, and not by any other means.

If you have any questions about conference, please contact the National Office on 020 7840 5600

Amy Leather and Charlie Kimber,
SWP joint national secretaries

HOW CAN THE SWP BUILD AND GROW IN THE ERA OF CORBYNISM?

Central Committee

The united front, working in action with others around common demands, is central to our work. We want to be part of broad movements against austerity, racism and war together with supporters of Jeremy Corbyn and other radical layers.

It is a symbol of the opportunities that movement such as Stand Up To Racism and Stop the War are backed not only by a group of left Labour MPs but the leader of the Labour Party.

It's central to our work to help build a genuinely mass anti-racist movement today. We have already seen some very positive developments—in particular the 8 October conference and the mobilisations in support of the Dubs amendment and to open the borders to child refugees.

But at the centre of the united front we need revolutionary organisation.

In previous documents we have outlined the necessity of combining broad united front work with political clarity. This is much easier to say than to actually do. However it is essential if we are not only going to attract new members but also involve our existing members and develop a new cadre.

Recruitment and membership

People are far more likely to remain members of the SWP if they feel the organisation, and they themselves, are playing an active role in transforming the world as well as deepening their own understanding of what is a very turbulent time. It is an exciting prospect that the SWP can offer.

But it depends on the party, at every level – local and national – pushing out wider into the movements, raising our political level and having great attention to detail regarding every new member and indeed comrade.

Our total party membership currently stands at 5936, up very slightly from last year. Just over 2,000 of these pay a regular subscription. One of the challenges we set ourselves at the start of the year was to increase the number of members paying subs regularly by direct debit (or in some cases by standing order).

The subs drive lasted from January until Easter. During that time we managed to increase both the number paying regular subs and the party's income. This is very necessary. Comrades give to the party very generously but over the last two decades our income has fallen.

If we want to employ more party full timers as well as all the other things we do then we will need to substantially raise it by getting more people to pay regularly and

seeing if those who are in a position to do so can raise their subs. We will be launching another subs drive at SWP conference in the new year.

This period is also a good chance to check our membership records. Are there people on our lists who are no longer members? Or who have moved? Or who we don't know but should be in touch with?

We are happy to take people off our membership lists in discussion with local branches. Our membership lists need to be up-to-date and trusted. If your branch does not use the lists from the centre then it is easy to miss new members who have joined and only contact the usual suspects rather than engaging with as many members as possible.

So far this year 435 people have joined the SWP, of whom 404 have remained members and 187 pay by direct debit. It can be seen from the table just how uneven recruitment across the party is.

Some districts like Manchester and North London show the possibilities that exist at the moment while other areas are not only failing to grow but are actually going backwards when you consider comrades that leave the party or move.

Clearly a district that does not recruit is not growing but a big district that recruits just three people is in fact shrinking.

Even recruiting twelve or thirteen means that your district is at very best standing still but in reality is going backwards. This is something we have to address urgently. Every area needs to have a conscious recruitment strategy that involves comrades locally thinking about who we know and can ask to join and how we can attract new people to our meetings and events.

It is very telling that Bristol managed to double its recruitment for the whole year in just one night when seven students joined recently at the end of a SWSS meeting. It both shows the potential but also exposes how conservative comrades have been all year about recruitment.

SWP branches, meetings and rallies

The SWP rallies with the title "Is socialism possible?" during May and June this year showed the potential to attract people in the current political climate.

We have not organised rallies on such a scale for a number of years but these meetings far surpassed anything from even four or five years ago. The rallies were organised on a near regional basis and had a range of speakers including from the Rotherham 12 campaign, junior doctors and local campaigns – alongside members of the SWP leadership.

It was great to have Irish TDs Richard Boyd Barrett and Brid Smith skype in to speak alongside French striker Axel.

Over 120 came to the rallies in Manchester and Birmingham with 10 and 6 people joining respectively while 110 came in Shef-

field where 3 people joined and 110 came in North London where 7 people joined. The rallies played a key part of recruitment this year with 33 people joining overall from them.

There are a number of lessons from building these rallies. Firstly, Corbynism opens up a debate about socialism, what it is and how it can be achieved. We need to engage at a much higher level with these questions.

We also need to remember that while many thousands are inspired by Corbyn that does not mean everyone has joined the Labour Party, and even those who have joined Labour are not always completely committed to the organisation.

Many are also working alongside us in campaigns, engaging with us and are interested in what we have to say.

We need to create forums where we can showcase our ideas and crucially ask people to join us. Every district should hold a public meeting this autumn on "After Corbyn's re-election: how can we fight for socialism?" and we will run another series of SWP rallies in the spring.

We can also learn a method of how to build for an event that applies to every meeting – not just rallies. The rallies were planned well in advance, had nice publicity and were well advertised. Comrades and non members were systematically asked to come along. Although we can't replicate a rally each week in our locality – our branch should have a similar political feel and be organised in a similar way.

Our weekly branch meetings should be places where people can come along and discuss the latest political developments, learn from history, debate new issues and engage with our theory. They should be exciting places where this is linked to activity and be an organisational hub for putting our ideas into action.

That means building the meetings. Some branches produce their own (good quality) flyers and posters. For example Haringey branch in North London made a postcard advertising a series of meetings for Black History Month. Their branch regularly attracts 20-30 people to its meetings each week. Other places systematically poster for their meetings. The SWP National Office has produced lots of template flyers for meetings that we recommend that you use to advertise your branch if you don't have access to a good designer in your local area.

But getting people to meetings or involved in the activities of the branch also requires talking to and engaging with branch members.

Every branch should have a branch committee that meets regularly to set a strategy and assess how things are going.

There should be a clear division of labour in the branch with people taking on roles like meetings organiser, membership secretary or paper organiser.

It is great that most branches send regular emails and texts out to members, and make Facebook events for their meetings. But nothing beats actually talking directly

to comrades.

All branches have members who cannot make every branch meeting but play an important role perhaps in their trade union or in SUTR. A branch committee should call such comrades regularly.

Similarly with newer members – a text is not going to win them to Marxism politics. Call them, arrange to meet them, ask them to some activity, invite them to the branch.

However, just putting on a meeting is only the start. What happens at the meeting? Thought needs to be put into how our meetings are organised, how we come across and the political atmosphere.

Long standing comrades need to avoid jargon as well as overly long contributions. Are we encouraging questions and if so are we actually answering the questions people come to our meetings and ask? Sometimes it's best to discuss these things beforehand with comrades.

The second part of the branch meeting should not just be a long list of "things to do". It is part of the branch leadership's role to think about priorities. Ideally there should be just two or three items in the second part that can be discussed properly. Then there can be announcements.

Announcements are announcements – not a chance for another 15 minutes of discussion. Haringey branch pass round an activity sheet during this part of the meeting where people can sign up for the different activities. All of this requires preparation and speaking to the comrade chairing, ideally the night before.

However even if all this goes to plan at the end of a meeting we still need to ask people to join the SWP. It is worth reminding comrades that if you are going to recruit people then you do need SWP joining forms out.

Even at the rallies recruitment was uneven between districts. Manchester was able to recruit ten people on the night because many comrades were involved specifically in the recruitment team – but also because others just instinctively asked people around them to join. There was no feeling it was a specialist job. Rather a culture of recruitment exists in the district.

In other places not enough comrades were doing the asking. We don't have to wait for a public meeting or rally to recruit. Most branches attract non members... so ask them to join.

Ask people we meet on our campaigning Socialist Worker stalls or after a campaign meeting. We should not be conservative about this. The word 'socialism' is on the agenda again. Now is the time to be the visible confident socialists trying to win people.

Socialist Worker: a push for more sales

We believe that Socialist Worker is the best paper on the left and that there is a much wider potential audience for the paper than we are presently reaching.

In PCB1 we wrote about the great

importance of our website and social media. But we believe the physical paper is still a crucial product. Chris Harman wrote in 1984:

"Success is only possible for a revolutionary current at any stage in its development if it can find some means of making the connections between principles, experience and the tasks of the moment. The revolutionary paper is absolutely indispensable because it is the mechanism for making these connections, for bridging the gap between theory and practice."

A website can do some of that work. It can seek to direct you from one issue and argument to another and endeavour to direct you into broader and broader argument. But it cannot offer in any way the same experience as 20 pages of content ideologically and physically united.

A website does not involve a human as seller and (the possibility) of someone asking you to come to a meeting, join a demonstration, read a pamphlet and to join the party.

Selling the paper is far more real for the buyer than looking at a website, and for the seller it is also a moment in their own political activity and development as they become the face of the party.

Socialist Worker provides arguments, analysis, history and theory at the centre of the movements against racism and austerity. It argues the priorities for action, highlights the possibilities of struggle and helps to organise. Winning Corbyn supporters to being paper readers is a crucial part of how we engage seriously with them over time.

People who read the paper are more likely to come to our meetings, read our other publications and join the SWP.

But we have to face reality. The paper sale is far too low. Here are some ideas as to how we can increase sales:

Street sales: Street sales are our flagship sales and where we sell the bulk of our papers. They must be campaigning stalls with posters, petitions, leaflets for activity as well as the paper, our other publications, recruitment forms and pamphlets.

The petition ensures we are reaching out to people rather than hoping they will approach us. The circulation comrades will send out useful materials.

But each branch also has to think about the local aspects of their sale. Is there a big fracking or NHS closure event that is coming up and needs to be advertised on the stall?

We should sometimes petition in support of such events, and we should definitely have a support sheet for any local workplace disputes on our table.

Petitions should be delivered to the relevant campaign or authority, and any response brought to subsequent sales to show to people.

In London there are often big demos on a Saturday that require comrades' attendance.

This strengthens the need for us to do Friday evening or Thursday evening sales.

Sales at universities and colleges are also very important.

Workplace sales: Sales outside workplaces are an organisational expression of our political belief that the organised working class is the key force to change society.

Even when struggle is low and we will sometimes sell relatively low numbers of papers, workplace sales are important.

We want to meet activists, find out about the arguments in the workplace and build links with workers. Every branch must do a minimum of one workplace sale a week.

Branches that don't do such a sale or want to extend their present number of sales should draw up a list of major workplaces and see how this fits in with where comrades live, what time they have available and what time workers go in.

Sales at work: Sales at work are golden. It is not easy to sell SW at work, but the rewards are huge.

You can create a group of people who identify with at least some of our arguments and who are likely to be on your side if there's a racist myth to be demolished or a strike to be built.

The scale of management surveillance is ever-greater, and the sheer pressure of work cuts the time to get to know people and find the people who would buy the paper.

So it's important to use every opportunity—a collection for refugees, a petition against an NHS closure, leafleting for a demo—to identify potential sellers. And then you have to ask them to buy, and chase them up, each week.

Speed: SW should reach comrades as soon as possible after it is printed. Being able to sell the paper at work or at meetings and campaigns or at college on Wednesday or Thursday makes all the difference.

If comrades don't have it until Friday they have just one day to find people and sell them a copy. If they get it by Monday it has inevitably lost its freshness.

The earlier comrades have the paper they more likely they are to read it and think about the arguments it puts forward. This will help with sales.

Winning new comrades: It is very important to win new comrades to sell SW. This requires political explanation, encouragement and organisation of good sales so that when new people begin they find an enthusiastic and welcoming environment.

A good experience of a Saturday sale makes it easier to discuss selling in campaigns to friends, at university or at work.

More subscription sales: Many activists in Stand Up To Racism or Labour or in our unions get the paper only occasionally because they don't see us each week. We should ask them to subscribe.

When we are doing public sales or sell-

ing to individuals at meetings we should have the subscription leaflet on hand so if we think people are particularly interested or if they have bought the paper two or three times we could ask if they'd thought about subscribing.

Marxism 2016

Marxism Festival is a flagship event for the whole SWP. We devote a lot of resources, time and effort to ensuring it is a success each year. We are right to do so.

Marxism is by far the biggest event of its kind in Britain. It plays an essential ideological role – both by educating our own members and also by engaging with much wider layers of people in the movements we are involved in.

This year over 2,700 people attended Marxism. Over 1,200 were non-members, with 400 people signing up to the event on the door.

Important names on the left including Tariq Ali, Moazzam Begg, Ilan Pappé, Dave Ward (CWU general secretary), Ronnie Draper (BFAWU general secretary), John Bellamy-Foster, and Sheila Coleman spoke at the festival. We saw packed meetings, four major ones in the Logan Hall and crucial debates.

Coming immediately after the vote to leave the EU the event played a major role in helping to orientate SWP members and non-members politically.

100 people joined the SWP (more than half on direct debit) showing the potential for us to win to people to the party and revolutionary organisation when we engage them over the big political questions.

We also sold over 753 Socialist Workers, 129 Socialist Reviews and 143 ISJs.

The impact of Marxism is not only during the actual days it takes place. The audio catalogue and videos from Marxism over the years are a vital educational resource.

The Marxism 2016 opening rally has attracted nearly 5,000 views so far, while over 3,000 people have viewed Mark Thomas speaking on “Corbyn, the Labour Party and the struggle for socialism” and over 2,500 have viewed Alex Callinicos on “Brexit: a crisis for global capitalism”.

We should ensure that new and longer standing members alike are directed to this important resource.

Branches should keep in contact with everyone who came to Marxism 2016 whether they joined the SWP or not, and invite them to our meetings and activities. It's very important that we remain in an ongoing dialogue with everyone who went to Marxism and with all our members about the political developments that have taken place since July. This is part of how we develop a periphery.

We also will need to think how we build for next year's Marxism event. The dates are Thursday 6 to Sunday 9 July 2017.

We will start earlier on the Thursday and have more meetings that day, and end with a big rally on Sunday evening. Overall there

will be nearly as many meetings as last year.

Much planning and work – both political and practical – is done to ensure as many people can get to Marxism as possible and that has to start early.

But attending Marxism makes a crucial difference to developing newer members, re-orientating longer standing members and recruiting. Publicity will be out in the New Year at SWP conference. Comrades need to think in every area how they can get the most out of this brilliant event.

Socialist education

The Marxism festival may be a highlight but our education work takes place throughout the year, often at a local level. Nobody joins the party with a fully fledged understanding of every aspect of the revolutionary Marxist views we hold.

And new developments such as Corbynism raise questions for all members to grapple with, such as the relationship revolutionaries have with reformists.

We have tried some new educational initiatives. The ‘Capital’ reading group set up in London at the end of last year has been a success, with new and longer-standing comrades engaging each month with Volume 1 of Marx's ‘Capital’.

In recent months a number of districts have also held educationals on the Labour Party – either over successive weeks or by holding a dayschool, like York.

A one off educational event on cultural appropriation is also planned, for December.

On a bigger scale our dayschool for students and new members back in March was a fantastic event, bringing together over 150 newer comrades.

The workshops covered oppression, imperialism, the EU, the Labour Party, Marxist theory and other topics. There was a very high level of discussion in all of them. It played an important role in solidifying a new layer of comrades and we hope to hold a similar day next March.

Similarly the London Young Members Caucus has brought younger and newer members together regularly to discuss different topics, but also to have an input into the party. Comrades are encouraged to raise questions and ideas, and make suggestions. We hope to create a similar Young Members Caucus in the North.

The recent ISJ dayschool on ‘Marxism and nature’ made a significant contribution to our understanding of developments such as the Anthropocene.

Such meetings and dayschools can create a focus for reading and discussion. But education takes place at every level in the party. Branches need to encourage new members to read both the classics and new books.

We also have to provide space for comrades to discuss, debate and ask questions – both in formal meetings and in less formal settings such as after a sale or a demo or over a cup of coffee.

Month	
Jan	29
Feb	36
Mar	50
Apr	36
May	31
Jun	45
Jul	124
Aug	19
Sep	22
Oct	43
Nov	–
Dec	–
Total	435

District	
Barnsley	2
Black Country	5
Birmingham	29
Bradford	3
Brighton	4
Bristol	14
Cambridge	4
Cardiff	5
Central London	15
Chesterfield	5
Coventry	6
Derby	1
Doncaster	2
East Devon, Somerset & Dorset	2
East London	25
Edinburgh	5
Essex	10
Glasgow	11
Hackney	3
Home Counties	4
Huddersfield	7
Hull	0
East Anglia & Norwich	0
Kent	6
Lancashire	7
Leeds & West Yorkshire	13
Leicester	3
Manchester	48
Merseyside	11
North London	39
North West London	6
Nottingham	8
Plymouth & Cornwall	2
Portsmouth	9
Rest of Scotland	2
Sheffield	12
South East London	19
South London	23
Southampton	4
Swansea	5
Thames Valley	4
Tyneside	14
Waltham Forrest	5
West London	25
York	7
National/other	0
Total	435

POLITICS IN THE WORKPLACE AND BUILDING FIGHTING UNIONS

Central Committee

The central fact about the class struggle in Britain today is the huge gap between the political radicalisation of large layers of workers and the very low current level of strikes.

Since the economic and financial crisis of 2007-8, both private employers and the state have attempted to increase the pressure on workers in Britain as they seek to shift the burden of the crisis onto the working class and increase the level of exploitation.

This has taken a variety of forms – cuts to public spending, further expansion of market mechanisms in the public sector, increased work intensification, attacks on pensions etc.

The capitalist class has had some success. One sign of this is what has happened to wages.

In the 1980s and 1990s, despite the attacks of Thatcherism and mass unemployment, median real wages grew by around 2 percent a year. This pattern began to change in the early 2000s as wage growth began to stagnate even before the financial crisis.

But since the economic crisis in 2007-8 wages have fallen significantly. The TUC, drawing on figures from the OECD club of advanced economies, estimates that UK real wages fell by 10.4 percent between the autumn of 2007 and the autumn of 2015. Only Greek wages fared as badly in relative terms.

Of course, the picture is uneven with some sectors like construction and business and financial services doing better than others and average weekly earnings are currently running slightly higher than the RPI measure of inflation (which includes housing costs). But the overall point remains – we have witnessed a sustained wage squeeze without recent historical precedent in Britain. And rising inflation is likely to create further pressure on wages.

Class bitterness

Combined with the wider attacks on conditions this has served to deepen the bitterness and anger and erosion of faith and trust in key institutions of British ruling class.

This is what underlines the series of political upheavals we identified in the Central Committee's general perspectives document in the first pre-conference bulletin: the emergence of a right wing populist party in Ukip, the dramatic rise in support for Scottish independence, the convulsions and explosive growth in membership of the Labour Party after Jeremy's Corbyn's

dramatic rise to the leadership, the contradictory revolt against the establishment by large swathes of workers in the EU referendum.

But it has not led to any decisive transformation in the level of class struggle. The overall picture is most clearly expressed by the figures for the average number of strike days per year over the last four and half decades. These are given below:

1970s	12.9 million
1980s	7.2 million
1990s	660,000
2000s	692,000
2010-15	568,000

These figures are from the government's Office of National Statistics. They certainly don't capture everything happening industrially, but the general picture is undeniable.

But the underlying class tensions and bitterness inside the working class – reinforced by the mood of political generalisation – do repeatedly throw up both glimpses of how a fightback could develop and real opportunities to shift the balance of class forces.

So the fightback in the National Gallery last year showed how a group of workers not associated with militancy – gallery workers – could win important gains by tapping into widespread solidarity by both staging a serious fight (the move to all out action was key) and relating to the political mood of opposition to privatisation.

The fascinating dispute by Deliveroo cycle couriers offers another glimpse (however limited) of how new, unorganised, groups of workers can organise and throw their bosses into disarray.

But these on the whole have been glimpses, powerful examples that show the potential. They have not been generalised in a way that could transform the current state of the class struggle. There have been important opportunities on a much bigger scale to make a real breakthrough. The pensions' dispute in 2011 did have this potential. On a smaller scale but very high profile and over a key question, the NHS, so too did the junior doctors' dispute.

But, thanks essentially to the role of the trade union leaders, such opportunities were squandered.

In the first half of this year we saw signs of some revival of national struggle – the Scottish lecturers' strike, the NUT in July, the strike across FE in England and strikes by university lecturers, and the junior doctors' dispute. But this faded fast, with the BMA calling off all its planned five day strikes and the NUT leadership retreating from national action.

A new challenge

In addition, we face a new challenge. The Tories' Trade Union Act presents a very serious threat to large scale national action by introducing legally required minimum thresholds in strike ballots.

Under the new act, legal strikes will require a 50 percent turnout in the ballot. And for certain "important public services" a legal strike will additionally require 40 percent of those eligible to vote to strike. These areas are set to include fire, health, schools, transport, border security and nuclear decommissioning.

Smaller scale strikes involving up to hundreds, even a few thousand workers will still be well within reach – Durham teaching assistants in Unison had a 64 percent turnout among around 1,750 members, for example – though it may increase the caution among officials before granting ballots.

However, the picture is likely to be much tougher when it comes to big national ballots. So for example, if the ballots for the 2011 pension dispute ballots were re-run with exactly the same turnout and yes votes but under the new thresholds the result would be that instead of over 2 million being able to strike legally, just 67,500 could do so.

The Trade Union Act is not yet fully in operation. It has passed through parliament but has yet to receive what is called a "commencement order". But this is expected to happen soon.

Of course, we should not simply accept that the new thresholds cannot be met. On the contrary, we have a vision of how turnouts could be driven up through real leadership at all levels of the unions.

But too often a routinist approach from the bureaucracy even if they want to win the ballot (and a cynical passivity if they don't), organisation that has been allowed to wither on the ground and a legacy of (at best) occasional national strikes without any real strategy, all serve to dampen potential turnout.

But the impact of the new ballot thresholds will put in jeopardy the potential for large national strikes in the near future.

We need debate inside the unions and the left about how we respond: what is the future of national bargaining when there is little prospect of an official national strike, over pay for example?

One of the workshops at the upcoming Unite the Resistance conference will be discussing these questions. It would be good to see contributions to the final pre-conference bulletin and in our publications about this issue.

A sober realism about the current state of the industrial struggle does not mean we should give an inch to the notion that there has been a fundamental erosion in the objective power or capacity of the working class to fight back due to the impact of neoliberalism.

Some of the old centres of working class organisation and militancy have gone in the last generation (mining, for example), others employ less workers and have been re-organised but still create enormous value for capital and retain considerable power (the car industry in the UK today) but alongside these new areas have acquired new power (logistics and transport workers

for example) and new groups of workers created (call centres, supermarkets) and over a longer period groups once that once saw themselves as “professionals” have radicalised (teachers, civil servants etc).

Nor has some fundamental cleavage appeared in the working class between a better off “salaried” and a disposable, insecure “precariat”.

Zero hours contracts are a reality and a scourge but most workers remain on permanent contracts (around four-fifths) and the average length of time people spend working for any particular employer has been relatively stable since the mid-1970s. Fashionable talk of a “gig” economy and the end of stable work is entirely misplaced.

A question of leadership

The gap between the attacks workers are facing and the scale of resistance is not rooted in an objective powerless or fragmentation inside the working class.

Of course anti-union laws, and changes in the process of how strikes are sanctioned within the unions, are factors that have an impact. But the crux of the problem is not structural but one of leadership, and its role in shaping workers’ confidence to fight.

As austerity has intensified the thirst for an alternative and desire for resistance has increased. There’s consistently huge support for anyone fighting back. Workers, particularly in the public sector, are increasingly politicised. This is reflected in the Corbyn mood, support for the junior doctors, but also, for example, in the response to Ken Loach’s ‘I, Daniel Blake’, which is touching a nerve for many working class people.

The potential of this politicised mood and rage at the establishment—reflected in the Brexit vote—has not been seized by the trade union leadership.

Six years into Tory rule, the unions’ response at a national level has fallen far short of what was both necessary and possible.

The steel unions’ failure to even call a major demonstration to demand nationalisation, led alone push for strikes and occupations, sums up the gap between the scale of the attacks and the wholly inadequate response.

Two other recent examples draw out both the potential our unions have to lead a fight, and their failure to do so.

Junior doctors’ dispute

Few would have predicted that those leading on the industrial struggle front in 2016 would be junior doctors. Yet the fight against the Tories’ new contract for junior doctors saw a key battle take place with a series of strike which for tens of thousands of junior doctors was framed as a highly political defence of the NHS. This was a dispute with a real potential to win.

We can and should point to the mistakes of BMA leaders, and rally behind the

small layer of junior doctors organising opposition to the retreat. But the critical failure was on the part of both the TUC and other trade union leaders who did nothing to turn a mass mood of sympathy for the junior doctors into real solidarity.

Had Mark Serwotka’s call for a national day of action, or the demand for a national demonstration, been put into practice, it would have received a huge response, ratcheted up the pressure on the Tories, and shown the BMA — both the doctors themselves and their leadership — that they were not alone.

Although both John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn identified with the junior doctors’ fight — appearing on a strike demo for example in Westminster—neither did the Labour Party call a national demonstration in support for the junior doctors.

Unison, the biggest NHS union, could also have used the pending attack on nurses and other health workers’ unsocial hours to open up a second front alongside the junior doctors.

Dave Prentis told the 2015 Unison Health conference that if their unsocial hours pay came under attack, Unison would “strike until we win”. Despite a palpable mood among wide layers of NHS members in Unison to take action, this was not acted on.

Trade Union Act

The second example is the Trade Union Act. Despite some union leaders fretting when it first mooted that “it poses an existential threat to the unions”, the TUC did little to challenge the Trade Union Bill and then after some changes to the proposed Act declared victory (TUC leader Frances O’Grady told September’s TUC “Congress - we beat them!”)

The FBU’s Matt Wrack, PCS’s Mark Serwotka, and the POA’s Steve Gilen actively argued for a more serious response — though in truth there was no great mobilisation in those unions either.

Despite the very low level campaign to build for it on the part of the TUC, 3,000 trade unionists did join the mass lobby of parliament. There was clearly a potential to mobilise on a mass scale over the Trade Union Bill — an opportunity not taken.

Looking for salvation from above

Despite important differences between sections of the union leaderships, it’s important to recognise that not even the best of them are in any serious way building towards mass coordinated strikes.

The priority is instead to build the left in the Labour party, organise the numbers drawn around Corbyn, and strengthen a side within Labour.

Meanwhile the worst of the bureaucracy seem bewildered by the Brexit vote, reflecting a deep seated fear and pessimism.

Yet some of these same union leaders are paradoxically pandering to racist arguments on immigration. And rather than looking to the hope of a Corbyn government, they called for a “united” or “electable” Labour party during the leadership election campaign.

Relating to the bureaucracy

The politicised nature of the period throws up opportunities to work in broad united fronts in response to austerity and racism, where we can work alongside figures at the tops of the unions. At the same time when necessary we have to clearly challenge and criticise unnecessary retreats from battle and missed opportunities by some union leaders, and put forward the argument that we need a strategy to defeat austerity.

Given that the lack of breakthrough in workers’ resistance can in the most part be explained by the role of the trade union leadership in not leading a fight, we have to continue to conduct an argument inside and across the unions for the level of action we need to take on the attacks.

At the same time there is much space to build politically in the unions and this is more effective where sections of the trade union leaderships can be involved. This in turn can help rebuild and strengthen networks at a rank and file level.

Stand Up To Racism—supported by the TUC and most major unions—provides the space to do so, while at the same time to work alongside not just left union leaders in building a strong and conscious anti-racist current inside workplaces and threaded through our unions, but more broadly, with leading figures from TUC and the big battalions.

What is to be done?

We need to continue to argue for national action based on generalising the political mood. Large numbers of workers want to see a national fightback. We have to attempt to give this mood a focus and to be identified with it when serious opportunities arise, even as we face new challenges posed by the Trade Union Act.

The most effective method for doing this is by tapping into the political mood we have identified — the massive support for Corbyn shows there is a mood for an alternative. But it goes beyond Corbyn. There is widespread anger about the zero hours culture, the vast pay rises for bosses and bankers, the housing crisis, a feeling that key services should not be privatised and run for profit and so on. There is a widespread mood of class bitterness and connecting with this is the best way to foster a mood for fighting back.

Of course, we won’t always see arguments for a fightback translating into action — on the contrary all too often we don’t. But relating to those that do want to fight is

vital, even if it is a minority.

So our comrades in Department of Work and Pensions rightly argued to reject a divisive pay deal backed by the majority of the Group Executive. We lost the vote at PCS conference but a substantial minority of delegates voted to reject the deal (43.5 percent).

In the NUT SWP members helped shape the debate about strikes in the wake of the Tories' announcement about forcing all schools to become Academies. We enthusiastically built the strike campaign and ballot, often delivering some of the best turnouts and Yes votes in the NUT Associations we help lead. But we were also right to move a motion at the July national executive that challenged the failure to name further strike days, carrying a minority with us.

Build solidarity with key strikes

There may be all too few strikes taking place, but those that do take place express a real feeling of resistance and are very popular.

Building solidarity with such strikes, such as those on Southern Rail—an intensely politicised dispute amidst a crisis on the railways—or the upcoming strikes by Durham TAs – sending messages of support, visiting picket lines with a delegation from your union branch, taking solidarity selfies, collecting money especially for more protracted disputes, getting a strike in to speak at a union meeting, can all play a vital role in sustaining local strikes, and potentially helping win victories that show that if we fight we can win.

This also lifts the mood in your workplace or union branch and can encourage a debate about resistance that we can build on.

We should also be looking to initiate action in our own workplace or union branches, especially where we occupy union positions. We can't fight on every issue and not every argument for resistance falls on fertile ground. But we should have an approach of actively looking for opportunities to argue for, and where possible lead, local resistance.

Unite the Resistance (UtR) cannot play the same role that it was able in the run up to the 2011 pensions strike when the struggle was moving forward.

That year saw half a million workers take part in a TUC organised demonstration in March and 750,000 then struck in June, providing a springboard to pull in almost the whole public sector with over 2 million striking at the end of November 2011 – the largest single day's strike action in Britain since 1926.

By working with a section of the trade union leadership that wanted to push the struggle forward UtR was able to pull around it significant forces and play a role in shaping the rising arc of struggle.

UtR today does not have the weight to bridge the huge gap in the class struggle. But it can continue to play a more modest but useful role providing both as a forum for debating the challenges facing the

movement and a network of solidarity with local strikes.

Every comrade in a workplace should try to UtR conference on 12 November and bring people from work or their union branch with them.

Rebuilding and the importance of wider politics

But for SWP members trying to build at work simply relating to strikes is insufficient – they are too few and sporadic. Most SWP comrades will not go on strike this year – and those that do, such as teachers and lecturers will probably only have taken one or two days of action. If we *only* relate to strikes and arguments for strikes, the outcome is likely to be frustration.

We need a much more rounded approach that relates to the totality of the mood and political generalisation inside large parts of the working class and which is present, even if sometimes under surface, in every workplace.

Discussing politics within the workplace is vital, raising motions at your union branch, taking petitions round work where possible can all be useful.

But we should also look for ways of developing initiatives inside the unions that give organisational expression to such political moods.

The call by Barnet Unison for a national libraries demo, which then developed to embrace museums and galleries and won the backing of Unison, Unite and PCS nationally is an excellent example.

The Higher Education Conventions initiated by UCU activists or the campaigns for a Primary school Charter in the NUT are others.

We should be looking to take up the concrete issues raised by the union or Labour leaderships and then seeking to take initiatives that seek to translate them into forms of action in the here and now.

A good example is the excellent 300-strong public meeting organised by Sheffield Trades Council to launch a local campaign for a £10 an hour minimum wage (now Labour policy) with one of our BFAWU comrades who has played a key role in the Fast Food Rights campaign speaking alongside John McDonnell and others. This has the potential to be replicated in other cities.

And looking for opportunities to sell Socialist Worker at work and in our union branches will be easier if we take a more rounded political approach and, in turn, this will help shape a more defined periphery around us.

The centrality of anti-racism

But the broadest front on which this approach can be pushed forward currently is around anti-racism.

The racism at the top of society has also produced a sizeable minority – and on some issues a majority – in opposition.

Questions around refugees, Prevent, EU migrants and Black Lives Matter are being

debated in workplaces. By taking up these questions we can pull a layer of workers into our union organisation and some will also move closer to the SWP – take and read Socialist Worker, come to Marxism and some join us.

Get your union branch to affiliate to Stand Up To Racism. The biggest obstacle is thinking too small – we should be looking to establish SUTR workplace groups in bigger workplaces and aiming to get large delegations to rallies, demonstrations and especially next year's 18 March anti-racist demonstration.

Can the union branch run a regular SUTR stall? Can it order hundreds of SUTR badges? Can it send its union banner to local and national rallies with a delegation? Can it invite speakers to the branch from SUTR?

Our union fractions should see this a central task in the weeks and months ahead.

Politics, and especially anti-racism, is central to the process of rebuilding our unions and renewing the network of union activists – a vital task. It is also the key to the SWP recruiting and developing a new cadre in the workplace.

Note:

Any comrade considering taking voluntary redundancy from their work or standing for full time union positions should contact the Industrial Department at the earliest opportunity to discuss this.

THE NARRATIVE ON NATIONAL STRIKES

Dave (Stoke)

There is a disjunction between our view of how to progress the class struggle in Britain and the current rhythm of collective bargaining, particularly at national level.

We are focused on the immediate needs of the struggle while union leaderships (full-time and lay; national and local) are generally locked into a much longer time horizon.

For example, maintaining existing national bargaining arrangements and relationships looms large for many unions, even when pay levels continue to be seriously eroded.

Our explanation in party publications and CC perspectives is a narrative of squandered opportunities with union leaders retreating from struggle. It has led to continual frustration, expressed with some force in our press. Our coverage of the ending or calling off of national strikes is usually denunciatory, reluctant to see any positives.

This contribution questions our narrative. It uses examples from two national

disputes to illustrate negative coverage: the UCU dispute in universities, 2013-14; and, very briefly, the calling off of the junior doctors' strike in September this year. The background to, and details of, the 2014-15 NHS dispute are then explored. The small print of this dispute mattered.

Finally, I compare our view of the TUC's campaign against the Trade Union Bill – it was called a “dismal failure” – with the much weaker results of opposition to earlier anti-union bills.

Squandered opportunities

Charlie Kimber, writing immediately after the 30 November 2011 (N30) strike, saw its potential outcome as “victory” or “sell-out or defeat” or “messy compromise”.¹ Most industrial disputes end in a messy compromise; there are few clear-cut victories and, fortunately, few total defeats – though, in some periods, there are many victories and, in others, many defeats.

Our characterisation of N30 was summed up in ISJ earlier this year: it was “a disastrous sell-out, which threw away the chance of victory that could have transformed the situation and instead led the movement to an unnecessary and serious defeat”.

Further, “the developing strike movement around pensions held within it the potential to transform the balance of class forces and open up a new period of struggle. The retreat meant that this potentiality never had the chance to be realised, and our class suffered a defeat.”²

No room for messy compromise here. The sell-out was “disastrous”; the defeat was “serious”. Union leaders (and their executive committees presumably) “threw away” the chance of victory. If only they would not behave in the way we expect them to behave then the situation could be radically transformed.

This begs several questions. *If* there was sufficient rank-and-file pressure, then the union leaderships would be forced into greater and more sustained official action, or unofficial action would achieve results on its own, or there would be a mixture of unofficial and official action.

In the current period of insufficient rank-and-file pressure, when did we start believing that the union leaders could unlock the situation for us?

And if groups of public sector workers were so badly defeated in 2011 why have most come back so quickly for more punishment? Why have new groups taking action not been deterred by this defeat?

Yet contributions by CC members in Socialist Review this year have continued the dominant narrative. Thus, in February: “even when workers have proved their willingness to fight on a very large scale when given a lead, such as in the big public sector

strikes of 2011 and 2014, many trade union leaders have chosen to retreat in favour of a ‘political’ solution to workers’ problems — a Labour government”.³

In May: “Ever since union leaders threw away the chance to score a breakthrough over the pensions dispute in 2011, we have seen other opportunities arise ... Each round in this cycle of mobilisation and retreat has produced frustration, sometimes leading to revolt ... but more often to a sense of demoralisation and disengagement with the unions”.⁴

In September: “why isn't there more struggle? A large part of the reason is the role of the trade union leaders who have missed opportunity after opportunity to support the struggles that do happen and to broaden them into a more powerful wave.”⁵

And in October: “We remain hampered by the defining role of the trade union bureaucracy in the parameters of struggle ... The real failure is on the part of the TUC leaders who had the power but did nothing to turn a mass mood of sympathy and support for the junior doctors into real solidarity.”⁶

One consequence of this dominant narrative is that our coverage of national strikes has, in many respects, been too negative. Socialist Worker is aimed not just at those who share our politics but also at those who don't. We often seem reluctant to take positives out of difficult situations, instead identifying another sell-out, even if we don't use that specific term.

Accentuate the positive

For my first example, SW criticised UCU's decision to call three 2-hour strikes in universities in January and February 2014, seeing this as “de-escalating the campaign” after the two joint-union one-day strikes on 31 October and 3 December 2013 (with another taking place on 6 February 2014).⁷

Yet, ironically, these 2-hour strikes, called at different times during the day, had more potential for union member involvement than whole-day strikes.

At the university where (although retired) I am still on the UCU committee, we held a two-hour branch meeting (with lunch provided) for the first strike. About 50 members stayed the whole time to discuss the situation and plan the next two strikes. On the second an outdoor rally was moved, due to torrential rain, to the students' union, followed by a teach-in.

On the last we picketed, leafleted and held lively demonstrations outside the main teaching buildings. In all three shorter strikes many more UCU members were involved than in the normal (mainly symbolic) picketing outside the main gates.

(They were also more lively and participatory than the UCU strikes on 25 and 26 May this year, 2016, when most universities had stopped teaching.)

With a looming marking boycott in April 2014 countered by employers' threats to dock 100% pay, UCU was offered (and accepted after a ballot) 2% for 2014–15 (operative from 1 August, the start of the pay year) although the 1% imposed in 2013–14 remained unaltered.

As SW correctly pointed out,⁸ 2% was below the RPI (then at 2.5%) and made no inroads into the successive pay cuts. But it wouldn't have hurt also to say that, despite all this, 2% clearly broke the 1% going rate in the public sector (even though universities are not covered by government pay guidelines they have slavishly followed them). The outcome proved that fighting could break the pay norm, and that other unions should take notice.

Second, when the BMA called off the junior doctors' first five-day strike, scheduled for September 2016, SW argued: “With their leaders wavering, and in the absence of any real solidarity plans from other unions or from the Trades Union Congress, the BMA buckled. The arguments for action now need to be redoubled.”⁹

SW could also have argued that, while strongly disagreeing with calling it off, the employers couldn't now claim there wasn't enough time to plan for the remaining strikes. SW could also have suggested in that report what practical solidarity would look like and how that could be built before the October strike.

The devil is in the detail

The NHS strikes in 2014 were the first national action since 1982. Shouldn't we ask why it took so long?

After the 1982 dispute, the government set up a pay review body for nurses, midwives and health visitors and another for ‘professions allied to medicine’ (such as physiotherapists and radiographers). This was done to keep such groups from becoming embroiled in industrial action again. In the mid-2000s, all NHS workers (apart from doctors and dentists who have their own review body) were brought into a single pay review body.

Pay review bodies are a form of collective bargaining, peculiar to public services. Unions and employers give evidence to them and, taking account of current government pay guidelines, the review bodies make recommendations to the secretary of state. Awards have sometimes been staggered by government.

The health service review bodies were set up with the understanding that any union taking industrial action over matters in the body's remit would be excluded. This kept the “peace” until March 2014, when

1 p16, <http://isj.org.uk/the-rebirth-of-our-power-after-the-30-november-mass-strike/>

2 pp115 and 117, <http://isj.org.uk/striking-debates/>

3 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/410/bringing-politics-union-movement>

4 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/413/signs-recovery>

5 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/416/balance-class-forces-after-brexit-vote>

6 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/417/trade-unions-and-corbynism>

7 <http://tiny.cc/flamgy>

8 <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/37985/UCU-reports+round+up>

9 <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/43322/Junior+doctors+strike+off+after+their+leaders+buckle>

health secretary Jeremy Hunt rejected the recommendation of a 1% rise to all grades for 2014–15.

Hunt announced that anyone in the English NHS receiving an increment that year (about 600,000 staff) was therefore automatically receiving at least a 1% rise. So he awarded 1% only to those at the top of their pay grades.

This was to apply for two years. In the second year those newly on the top of their grade would get 1%; those already on it another 1%. These rises were “unconsolidated”, not affecting overtime or unsocial hours’ payments. They would be removed in April 2016 and those affected return to their April 2013 (or 2014) pay level.

As importantly, by announcing an award also for 2015–16, Hunt usurped the function of the pay review body and called its future into question. This combination was a step too far and a mixture of strikes and action short of a strike (ASOS) was eventually organised in England. Separately, Scotland agreed to pay the 1% across the board as well as a living wage for the lowest paid.

The action in England saw the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), whose rules against industrial action had been changed in 1995, undertake its first strike. (This must have fed in to its decision to affiliate to the TUC in 2015, leaving the BMA and RCN as the only significant unions outside the TUC.)

The dispute saw two small TUC-affiliated unions that, with the RCM, had not struck on N30, take ASOS. These were the British Dietetic Association and the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA, currently negotiating national recognition in the NHS). The HCSA narrowly failed to win a majority (48–52%) in its first ever strike ballot.

The HCSA’s ballot was over a separate (but related) dispute as its members were only affected by Hunt’s similar treatment of the doctors and dentists review body. (This review body was to recommend, for 2015–16, a 1% across-the-board rise in Scotland but, with reservations, stuck to Hunt’s policy in England.)

In the first four-hour strike, on 13 October, the striking unions included Unison, Unite, GMB and UCATT,¹⁰ and three NHS-specific unions: the RCM and two independent unions under Unison’s umbrella, the British Association of Occupational Therapists (BAOT) and Managers in Partnership (MiP). POA members at three high security psychiatric hospitals and the Society of Radiographers (SoR) struck separately the next week. All these unions struck together in November.

In Wales a different offer from Hunt’s had Unison to call a strike for 10 November. SW rightly challenged the resulting settlement but perhaps could have identified the basis of a deal for the English NHS, rather than comparing it to the two-year agreement in local government.

A threatened 12-hour strike on 29 Jan-

uary and a 24-hour strike in February were sufficient to force concessions in England and were suspended when a deal was put to the unions. (Another union, the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists, which had struck on N30, called off its own ballot on industrial action at this point.)

Without going into the minutiae, the deal’s main feature was a 1% across-the-board “consolidated” rise for 2015–16, and a promise to use the pay review body for 2016 onwards. No alteration was made to the imposed deal for 2014–15.

This was “derisory” as Socialist Review claimed, adding “It does nothing to make up for years of pay freezes and real terms pay cuts.” But the unions involved were, as they saw it, not fighting that battle – they wanted the pay review system to continue and to re-establish the principle of across-the-board consolidated pay rises.

SW’s take was that the deal “would avoid the unions having a dispute with a potential Labour government in the run-up to May’s general election – and for a whole year afterwards”.¹¹ This was later made more specific: “union leaders called off two planned walk-outs last month because of pressure to get behind Ed Miliband”.¹² Was that the case with the RCM and SoR?

In Northern Ireland, where no offer at all had been made, Unite and GMB members had come out on the same dates as in England in 2014. They came out again in the planned 12-hour strike in January 2015 (suspended in England). Eventually the original English offer of 1% unconsolidated at the top of grades was made for 2014–15.

The RCM and SoR then balloted separately in Northern Ireland and came out for four hours on 30 April 2015. Several unions (including Unison) took part in ASOS after that date. But it was not until January 2016 that an offer was even made for 2015–16, after the Royal College of Nursing – for the first time in its history – announced the date for a ballot on ASOS. While the offer was indeed even more derisory (another 1% unconsolidated for the top of grades), the minister now pledged to follow the 2016 review body recommendations, which was a breakthrough.

The TUC and the Trade Union Bill

Under the headline “Draconian Trade Union Act could have been stopped and must be defied”, SW branded the union leaders’ campaign against the Trade Union Bill a “dismal failure”.¹³ It claimed that “the TUC had... thrown in the towel on full-scale confrontation”. (What does “full-scale confrontation” mean?). It continued: the TUC “relied on lobbying Tory MPs and the Lords instead of mobilising members.”¹⁴

Socialist Review similarly argued “the TUC’s approach has been to focus on lobbying the Lords for favourable amendments rather than any attempt at a serious mobilisation of union members to stop the bill”.¹⁵

Two factors are significant here. First, when has trade union pressure stopped or seriously amended anti-union bills before? Second, were there significant changes to the Trade Union Bill?

On the first, unofficial opposition stopped Labour’s ill-fated White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, in 1969 (see a recent ISJ).¹⁶ But there is no instance of anti-union Bills being stopped or seriously amended once they got to Parliament.

Despite a huge demo and official and unofficial strikes against the Industrial Relations Bill in 1970–71, the opposition to it produced little in Parliament.¹⁷ (The most important amendment was introduced by the government, in response to the TUC policy of non-registration of unions. By changing to compulsory registration, the government hoped to undermine opposition¹⁸ – in the event, this ploy failed.)

Clearly union opposition to the Industrial Relations Bill and Act was an important factor in the Labour Party’s agreement to repeal it. But TUC policy of non-cooperation with the institutions created by the IR Act (although only partially successful) has no parallel in the 2016 Trade Union Act (or in the 1980–1993 laws) as there are no new institutions.

Campaigns against the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts saw significant campaigning. In 1980 there was a demonstration on 9 March, a limited “Day of Action” on 14 May, and a “Union Day” with lunchtime demonstrations in June.

A “Conference of Executives of [TUC] Affiliated Unions” met in April 1982 to respond to the 1982 Employment Bill and agreed the “Wembley Principles” of opposition. But the 1980 and 1982 Bills, unlike the 1971 Act, provided no central focus for non-cooperation, and went through Parliament with limited changes.

Generations earlier, the opposition to the 1927 Trade Disputes and Trade Union Bill, passed as Tory retribution after the 1926 General Strike, generated a massive campaign organised by the TUC. But even the TUC was forced to admit: “Never has so large a campaign received so little attention”.¹⁹

The Tory government had no compunction in changing opting out of, to opting in to, union political levies. With this measure Labour Party affiliated membership fell by one-third, with resulting funding problems for Labour for the next

ns+must+break+the+law+to+defend+workers+rights

15 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/413/signs-recovery>

16 pp39–41, <http://isj.org.uk/the-fight-against-anti-union-laws/>

17 E. Heffer, *The Class Struggle in Parliament* (1973) recounts the unsuccessful parliamentary opposition to the Bill.

18 M. Moran, *The Politics of Industrial Relations* (1977), p121.

19 TUC Annual Report, 1927, pp248–259.

11 <http://tiny.cc/m7amgy>

12 <http://tiny.cc/r8amgy>

13 <http://tiny.cc/yhbmgy>

14 <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/43364/TUC+Congress+-+unio>

10 A UCATT ballot on merging into Unite finishes on 1 November.

twenty years.

The TUC campaign – outside Parliament – against the 2015 Trade Union Bill was mainly educational and not industrial. But by comparison with the failure to stop or alter earlier anti-union legislation, the passage of the Trade Union Bill though Parliament did see significant changes.²⁰ While the 14-days' notice for strikes, and the new thresholds for ballots, the heart of the industrial action clauses of the Bill, were not changed, much else was.

Was this a "dismal failure" compared to previous efforts? Or is the failure by us to come up with anything more constructive than demands to "defy" the Act (without identifying how that could be done).²¹

Conclusion

First, to repeat my problem with the narrative of squandered opportunities, when did we start believing that the union leaders could unlock the situation for us?

Second, let our coverage of national strikes be more positive; small gains can sow the seeds of bigger ones. Third, we may not often agree with unions' limited bargaining objectives but we need to understand them first before we try to broaden, or challenge, them in our interventions.

Engaging with, and not lapsing into denouncing, unions' policies and practices is not the same as being their cheerleader.

CORBYNISM AND WALES

Gary (Swansea)

'Uncertainty is the new normal'...these are the words uttered by those social commentators normally associated with the political establishment after the Brexit vote. Just a year on after the Tories won an election they didn't expect to win in May 2015, British politics is in flux.

Britain has voted to leave the EU, Cameron has resigned and Theresa May's short honeymoon period as PM seems to be over, and UKIP is in existential crisis.

Jeremy Corbyn's victory as leader of the Labour Party on September 23rd with an increased majority (second time around) has added to this time of tumult in British politics.

Corbyn's victory has shifted the Labour Party to the left, however, in Wales Labour has been the dominant governing party either as a largest party or in coalition with smaller parties in the Welsh Assembly.

It would be pertinent to give a brief overview on the state of Labour in Wales, the challenge of defining 'Corbynism' in a Welsh context and how we in the SWP can best relate to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party.

Labour in Wales

In Wales, like its Scottish counterpart, Welsh Labour has often prided itself as being distinct from the main Westminster Labour Party. A 'clear red water' it is often cited. Wales is often seen as Labour's heartland, however, in recent years the dominant hold Labour historically had in Wales is gradually being undermined politically.

Although short of a majority, Labour in Wales are the largest party in the Welsh Assembly or 'Senedd' and are responsible for a £15 billion budget via a block grant determined as part of the national UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

The money is placed in the Welsh Consolidated Fund (essentially Wales' bank account) and the Welsh Government then prepares its draft Budget setting out how it will use the funds.

National Assembly Committees and other interested parties then scrutinise and comment on the draft Budget before it is finalised, and approved by the National Assembly for Wales in the annual Budget motion.

Of the 60 seats in the Senedd Labour failed to reach a majority gaining 29 seats just two short of a majority in the recent assembly elections of 2016.

Plaid Cymru gained a seat in Labour's traditional heartland of the Rhondda, while more worrying was the rise of UKIP vote who gained seven regional seats as a result of proportional representation who are now the fourth largest party in Wales and now entitled to sit in the Senedd. More recently, Labour were seeking alliances with other parties including Plaid Cymru and a sole Liberal Democrat AM to get its budget through the Assembly.

In the EU referendum vote Wales voted to leave by a majority of just over 5% in the 22 local authority areas in Wales - 17 vote Leave, five vote Remain in a turnout of 71.7%.

Apart from the capital Cardiff and a couple of rural areas in north-west Wales the rest of Wales voted to leave.

Wales has been a major recipient of EU 'structural' funding for investment, research, development and for jobs, etc. with over £4 billion of European money since 2000 going to Wales. So how do we account for the leave vote?

Of course the leave vote is multifaceted. No single issue was the most defining factor, but like elsewhere in the UK some voted for racist reasons and this could possibly be attributed to the rise of the UKIP vote since the European elections earlier this year.

However, this cannot be the major fac-

tor, Wales has taken in very few refugee/asylum seekers, according to the Welsh Refugee Council the United Kingdom only has 1% of the world's refugees. Wales has around 8% of the UK's share.

The central factor why people voted to leave it could be argued was a revolt against the establishment.

Liberal commentators often cite that the UK is slowly coming out of recession, however, for a majority of people in the valleys and former industrial towns these areas have been decimated and have not fully recovered since Thatcher's neo-liberal onslaught of the 1980s.

The vote was partly driven by the bitter anger and relentless attacks on working people for decades and this was expressed in the vote. Of course, Wales and in particular South Wales is not unique to these continued attacks also suffered by many in the former industrial northern towns in England for example but it was a major factor to give the establishment a bloody nose.

Although the Senedd has no income tax raising powers, some government departments such as education and health are both devolved in Wales.

For example, education is not subject to the Tories' divisive policy of a return to more grammar schools (there are no grammar schools in Wales), secondly, the policy of 'league tables' has not been adopted (however, the issue of colour-coded banding has been suggested).

Health policy too in Wales is also devolved with prescription charges abolished and hospital car parking charges phased out.

For students (although this policy has been reneged on recently) a Welsh Government subsidy ensured students ordinarily resident in Wales pay around £3,500 a year for their studies wherever in the UK they decide to study.

These policies are in the interests of working people and to be welcomed but they must also be defended from increasing budgetary pressures from within the Senedd.

Under First Minister Carwyn Jones Welsh Labour has presided over and been responsible for of damaging budget cuts on council spending and public services.

So Welsh Labour under Carwyn Jones (who is no ally of Corbyn) find themselves in a contradiction who often portray themselves traditionally on the centre-left now find themselves to the right of Corbyn politically.

It is also important to note that when Jeremy Corbyn first stood for leader of the Labour Party not one Welsh Labour MP nominated him to be leader and only one Labour assembly member (AM) nominated him to be on the ballot paper and who then subsequently voted for one of the other three candidates.

When Corbyn declared his candidacy to become labour leader one of the first places he visited was Swansea, in which he packed out a hall of about 150 people. Of course

²⁰ TUC General Council Report 2016, p31, for a summary of changes.

²¹ For suggestions, see Dave (Stoke), "Anti-strike laws and resistance to them", PCB 3 (2015), and pp59-61, <http://isj.org.uk/the-fight-against-anti-union-laws/>

Corbyn went on to secure an overwhelming 60% victory over his rivals tapping into a growing anti-austerity, anti-war, anti-Trident, pro-worker rights agenda.

For the Blairite and moderate wing of the party Corbyn's victory wasn't supposed to happen – one of the other pro-market Blairite candidates was supposed to get elected. But he did elected!

Ordinary Labour party members felt ignored with New Labour's direction the war in Iraq and policy betrayal with some wanting a say in party decision making and a return to sort of old Labour policies.

However, what Corbyn's victory has exposed is the deep contradictions within the Labour Party structure for decades if not since its formation and the dominance in which the PLP has hold sway on policy and decision making.

Showing solidarity

Over the years SWP comrades have worked with individual members of Welsh Labour and supporters over a wide number of issues and local campaigns throughout the years such as building Stop the War, supporting strikers such as the recent National Museum strike where comrades were instrumental in showing solidarity and raising money through collections and union donations.

Again there was had an excellent demonstration in support of refugees/asylum seekers in the local square in Swansea again working with Labour members with five hundred people attending. SWP members were also instrumental in building a wide opposition against the various fascist mobilisations, through UAF and SUTR recently, comrades along with Labour members, councillors and local MPs mobilised against the Nazi 'White Pride' march in Swansea of March of this year which saw a massive turnout of anti-fascists opposing to the Nazis by six to one.

All this is to SWP comrades credit throughout Wales, moreover, there we have been demonstrations against all these campaigns mentioned above but without SWP involvement showing solidarity building within the various united fronts they wouldn't have as big, and we can be proud of our involvement and this is the respect we have gained in standing in the interests to defend our class and politics.

During Jeremy Corbyn's second leadership campaign wherever he went in the UK he inspired thousands of people to attend the rallies or come to 'cheer' him on and to hear his 'socialist' anti-austerity message.

Wales was not immune from this. For example, he spoke to over seven hundred people in Merthyr Tydfil, in Swansea he spoke to over 1200 people at a local leisure centre organised by the Labour Left, people were queuing around the block.

This was an inspiring meeting which saw hundreds of new people both young and old attending the event inspired by

Corbyn's message the party had a good intervention, we sold over seventy papers and handed out leaflets for the anti-Tory demo in Birmingham and for the SUTR conference in early October.

Like all these meetings Corbyn addressed one could get the feeling of an exciting shift to the left and being part of a potential social movement.

However, this enthusiasm for Corbyn is not replicated everywhere and it is uneven elsewhere in the country and this is true in Wales, and herein lies the problem with Labour in Wales.

Momentum's sister organisation in Wales is Welsh Labour Grassroots (WLG) which claims on its website: to stand for socialist policies, greater democracy within the Labour Party and the extension of democratic devolution in Wales.

During the leadership campaign SWP comrades were fraternally welcomed into the Corbyn rallies and we were allowed to have a SUTR stall at one of the JC4PM event's held in Swansea's Guild Hall. Again another inspiring event with over three hundred attending a night of music, comedy and poetry with comrades leafleting and selling papers.

When it came to the EU referendum whether to remain or leave the debates with Labour locally became more polarised.

At a public meeting staged by Labour a few comrades found themselves in a minority having to defend the SWP's position to leave the EU in a room vastly outnumbered full of Labour remainers. This was probably the experience of a majority of SWP comrades nationally.

However, after the referendum decision on June 23rd some Labour supporters were often hostile and accused the SWP of lining up with 'vote Leave' campaigners, some of this fervour even spilt out onto social media and outright hostility especially after the vote was declared.

Local contradictions

At WLG meetings which are open to members/supporters, yet, if you are not a supporter of Labour then you have been 'prescribed' and barred from attending. This includes groups on the left such as the SWP!

Although our experience of most Labour members and of WLG are genuinely fraternal, a few of the 'old guard' Labour councillors, and some officials in trade union positions considered to be on the 'soft left' are at best hostile if not sectarian.

What is clear is that the WLG leadership in Wales want to maintain a firm grip on the future direction of WLG and that any 'interference' by the revolutionary left will not be welcome.

Hitherto, in Wales this seems to be the adopted approach by WLG and that building on the mass support Corbyn received throughout his leadership campaigns that this opportunity could be stymied or at

worst lost. The dangers of this approach is highlighted by Charlie Kimber, in an open letter to a Corbyn supporter he writes:

The Labour right must be confronted. If they threaten to go, good riddance. But if they stay, there's a great danger that you could be drawn into endless internal battles. I'm for de-selection of Corbyn's enemies. But you might end up directing most of your energy to the long slog, through tortuous processes and endless meetings, to (perhaps) get rid of a right winger. This is not the crucial arena. The best way for Jeremy to beat back the right and win the next election is to head up a fight against austerity in the workplaces and the streets.

There is a danger in Wales that the struggle inside Labour is one of manoeuvring and the primary aim is to get WLG members elected to Labour Party positions.

Of course Momentum would say that they need to win and secure the democratic structures of the Labour Party to get Corbyn elected.

This may seem logical but what happens if or when Corbyn gets elected? How is Corbyn's Labour Party going to bring a 'socialistic' change through parliament? What about the large undemocratic aspects of the state the unelected army, the police and security services? Can the state be reformed? These debates of between reform or revolution are as old as the Labour Party itself. Of course for Marxist's we say power doesn't lie in parliament. It lies in the economic ownership and control by the bosses and multinationals and that the state merely serves its interests.

While the rallies has galvanised mass support for Corbyn with hundreds/thousands either attending or joining Welsh Labour they have done next to nothing to mobilise these new members!

The policy seems primarily to be getting Labour elected. In the local constituency wards there has often been a historic disconnect between Labour members from each other with constituencies with not knowing who each other are and there seems a lack of communication.

In addition, even at Labour Party constituency meetings they are often poorly attended procedural and quite bureaucratic.

Some Labour members I'm told state that having meetings to discuss ideas is something the far-left do and not for the Labour Party. This is also noticeable when it comes to activity too.

For example, the threat of closure of the Tata steelworks in Port Talbot is a case in point. Although there was a small demonstration in the Port Talbot to show solidarity with the steel workers the Labour Party were nowhere to be seen.

They would say that there is a lot of work behind the scenes to keep the steelworks open maybe! Our approach would be to build the widest opposition possible show solidarity with the workforce and to try to

involve the local community to fight the threat of closure that would inevitably have a damaging effect on the town.

Of course it would be churlish to say that individual labour supporters do not attend picket lines or demonstrations, but it is often a dismal showing with often a few supporters with a sole Labour Party banner.

There appears to be no structure within Labour locally and how to build an effective intervention on the ground. Labour party members are often atomised with no co-ordination between the different branches. This is partly historic since the defeats of the 1980's when the politics of the Labour Party shifted to the right and the main focus of New Labour was 'electoralism' at any cost, with layers of activists either becoming demoralised or dropping out from activity altogether. The only time Labour activists are visible are during election times, canvassing for a Labour vote! Surely, politics has to more than putting crosses on a ballot paper.

Conclusion

The re-election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader is a reason to celebrate its now the largest party in Europe with over 500,000 members. Corbyn has overcome the hostility of the media and the slurs from top bosses such as Virgin's Richard Branson and some in his own party.

He has defied the plotting of the 172 Labour MPs who voted "no confidence" in him, and the hatred of much of the party bureaucracy. He has won despite Labour's national executive committee blocking 130,000 people. He has shown that socialist ideas can be popular and that the crisis of mainstream politics can be resolved to the left.

However, Corbyn's leadership victory poses a historic opportunity on the left to build a broad social movement against neo-liberalism but it is also a frustrating one. There seems to be a disconnect between the rhetoric of Corbyn's and John McDonnell's vision of where they would like to take the Labour Party and what we see here on the ground in Wales where Labour are in control of the Welsh Assembly implementing Tory cuts at council level.

Moreover, this is the experience of many SWP comrades where Labour are in control of local budgets and not specifically unique to Wales. I have focused on one localised area of South Wales, comrades elsewhere in Wales may have a different experience of working with Labour Party members locally.

The Labour Party is a reformist party and it always has a "broad church" of varied political viewpoints and positions within its ranks.

However, they themselves have to decide on what type of party they wish to be—are they primarily an electoral party which sees parliament as the single aim to achieve their manifesto pledges or are they a party that wishes to build a "social movement"

outside of parliament? That is of course a discussion for the Labour Party itself.

The outcome of the battle between left and right in the Labour party and the wider attacks on Corbyn will ultimately be resolved by a mass movement on the streets rather than inside the Labour party and Corbyn realises this. However, we can acknowledge the appeal by some of those on the left to orientate towards Labour at this time.

These are optimistic times for socialists. Corbyn has opined socialist ideas, however, these can be frustrating times too especially how the Labour Party operates in the localities. For the SWP has to constantly seek to find ways to connect with this audience around Corbyn a tricky task and this requires a level of clarity on the nature of 'reformism', as the CC in IB1 states...our political clarity is only relevant if it raised within the context of finding an audience and engaging in joint activity with Corbyn supporters.

The united front method is how we should operate and aim to influence those who support Corbyn. Especially around the issue of immigration and anti-fascism where the SWP has gained much respect. It would require politics dragged from the parliamentary chambers into the streets. That's why an independent revolutionary organisation such as the SWP is crucial in the current period. However, it is also a major challenge.

STUDENTS, POLITICS AND THE SWP

Central Committee

There is generally a high level of politicization on campuses. The main focus for this has been around anti-racism and support for Corbyn, and our experience this year in the universities of colleges is one of a big audience for socialist ideas.

The key for us is how we can play a role in building a mass movement against racism to match the politicization, as well as developing a new layer of revolutionaries in the process.

One thing to bear in mind is that although there is a great political openness, the vast majority of students are of a generation who have little experience of being involved in mass movements and campaigns.

While of course there are a small layer of seasoned activists, the main bulk of the student body have had little contact with mass movements.

If you are an 18 or 19 year old starting at university this year, you were probably too young to have been involved in the

2010 student movement even as part of the EMA protests, let alone wider campaigns that have had a bigger impact such as Unite Against Fascism or Stop the War.

Remember the 2003 Iraq invasion was 13 years ago when a new undergraduate was just 6 years old! Although the legacy of anti-war and anti-racist movements does live on, it is not uncommon to find that most students we meet through SWSS meetings or come across in SUTR have no prior experience of going to regular political meetings or of what a mass movement or struggle looks like.

In some ways this has been reflected by the contested terrain for left wing politics that we've witnessed over the past year or so.

Eighteen months ago, before the phenomena of Corbynism, it was popular to reject political organization, with groups such as the Brick Lane Debates holding mass meetings of hundreds (of mostly young) people that called for an alternative political strategy.

The Radical Assembly enjoyed brief success after the 2015 election, when it attracted 1,000 people to its inaugural event where social democracy in the organized sense was declared dead.

Occupations at places like KCL and LSE were very much centred on autonomist and horizontal political strategy. Now the situation is much different – the vast majority of the student left have now joined Labour or at least look to Corbyn, while many thousands of others are inspired by him.

Corbynism on campus

The impact of Corbynism on campuses has been important. Having a socialist Labour leader has led to a renewed interest in socialist ideas not seen for several years. Our SWSS groups have found that pitching ourselves as the socialists on campus – who hold meetings on the big political questions but also campaign against racism, austerity and war – usually gets a good response from a significant layer of students.

However, the organizational form of Corbynism has been more uneven. In a few places, Corbynistas have managed to get elected on to the committees of Labour Societies.

It seems that the majority of Labour Socs are still dominated by the same politics they were before Corbyn was elected in 2015 – a mixture of centre and right wing Labour that have acted as a conduit into the upper echelons of the party. This has created a tension.

If you are an 18 year old Corbyn supporter, you probably came to university hoping to get involved in activity on the issues Corbyn stands for – against racism, war, austerity and so on.

However on most campuses, the Corbynistas have not succeeded in transforming Labour Societies into a place for this kind of activity, reflecting the entrenchment (similarly to CLPs around the country) of the politics from the Labour centre or

Labour right.

Generally speaking, it seems Momentum has been unable to address this tension. So while The World Transformed Festival in Liverpool was an impressive event that involved quite a few students, there has been a noticeable absence of Momentum at Freshers Fairs or on campus.

This hold of the Labour right has been combined with the hollowing out of democracy within the official structures of local Student Unions. Student Union general meetings are rare. Decisions are often made by small groups of students behind closed doors while Student union bureaucracy has increased – making even setting up a society or booking a room difficult. The governments Prevent strategy has made SU's very nervous about political meetings, vetting speakers and sometimes even stopping them from coming.

In this situation there is a real opening for SWSS to be the pole of attraction for socialists on campus, including Labour party members.

We want the best Corbynistas to see SWSS as the place for socialists on campus. SWSS groups should be a place where we combine discussion of the big political questions with activity such as responding to calls from Stand Up To Racism, supporting local strikes, building the NUS demo and so on.

For that to happen we need to combine a high political level with a strategy around stalls, meetings, contacts and so on

Racism and oppression

A key feature of the political landscape on campus has been a growing radicalization around anti-racism.

Increasing layers of students have demonstrated a real anger at the growing Islamophobia and racism being pushed by the government.

Malia Bouattia's stunning victory in the NUS Presidential election – due to her record on fighting Islamophobia and Prevent – is one indication of this.

So are the big debates held in central London on issues such as 'What are British values?' hosted by the Decolonising Our Minds Society at Soas, which have attracted hundreds of students.

Many BME societies and officers have held events such as 'Why is my curriculum white?' Indeed it seems most of the recent big demonstration – People's Assembly, anti-war mobilizations, Stand Up To Racism protests – have all been characterized by vibrant student blocs, many of them led by young black and Muslim students.

Ideas around identity politics and privilege theory also remain relatively dominant.

At the NUS Black Students Conference this year, there was a big debate on political blackness. Some at the conference argued that Black Student Officers had to be 'ethnically black', not 'politically black'.

The conclusion of this line of argument was that some Muslims – those not

considered 'ethnically black' – should not automatically be in the NUS Black Students Campaign or the campaign should change its name.

In a context when Malia Bouattia (former Black Student Officer and now NUS President) was already facing slurs and attacks from the NUS right for being anti-semitic, this was a clear use of identity to undermine her and the wider Left.

This gives a glimpse of how the ranking of oppressions that comes with identity politics can potentially be a block to a wider unity in the fight against racism, and indeed other forms of oppression.

However, these arguments are very much the common sense when dealing with such questions among many students reflecting the prevalence of such ideas in wider academia.

Comrades on campuses have to find ways to engage with these ideas and to challenge them without it becoming a barrier to working with people who can be drawn to these ideas but who genuinely want to fight racism and oppression.

Building Student Stand Up To Racism

This is where the initiatives called for by Student SUTR come in, challenging racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism.

In the past year, Student SUTR has held mass meetings such as the 100 strong rally at Sussex University to mobilise for the March 2016 SUTR demo and organised a massive student bloc on the March 19 Demo.

It also put on a coach of students on the J18 Convoy to Calais, and SUTR societies have been set up at several campuses. In addition every year students join the Unite Against Fascism trip to Auschwitz.

Hundreds of students attended the SUTR conference in October, and there were around 150 at the student session. This shows the potential for an anti-racist movement on the campuses and Student SUTR has been launched to create a network of anti-racists on campuses across the country.

NUS president Malia Bouattia spoke at the SUTR conference, alongside vice presidents Shakira Martin and Shelly Asquith.

Since then students in SUTR have organized protests and vigils in support of the Dubs Amendment, have been involved in building the city wide SUTR rallies and are organising for the SUTR Winter Appeal for refugees, as well as Islamophobia Awareness week in November.

Student SUTR has called for a number of events on campuses in the coming months:

- November: Public meetings on campus 'Confronting the rise in racism'. Student SUTR has also organized a joint week of action with MEND against Islamophobia in education, starting on November 21st. They have called for as many events as

possible – panel discussions, SU events, MEND Islamophobia exhibition, Islamophobia workshops etc

- November 19: SUTR bloc on UCU & NUS education demo
- 10 December: national day of student action in support of refugees, including student convoy to refugee camps in France. This should be accompanied by fundraising and political events in the lead up to Dec 10 to raise awareness for it.
- 27 January 2017: Holocaust memorial day
- 18 March: Stand Up To Racism demonstrations, London and Glasgow. Students SUTR groups are asking for local Student Unions to put on coaches and organize mobilizing meetings in the weeks before. NUS conference and NUS Black Students conference both voted to work with SUTR.

Branches and SWSS groups should approach local SUTR groups and approach others on campus to set up these events, including Labour societies, Islamic societies, Student Union officers, Student Action for Refugee societies, Afro-Caribbean Societies and so on.

The timeline of activities called for by SUTR gives us the chance to work with big layers of students to discuss how we can mobilise against racism on campus.

Comrades should feel confident in working with SUTR to approach a range of groups to build a mass movement against racism on the campuses. Crucially student SUTR can help mobilise large numbers of students for the demonstration in March.

NUS

For the first time in years, the Left has a majority on the NUS leadership. One outcome of this has been the United for Education demo on 19 November organised by UCU and NUS – the first joint demo between the two in at least 4 years.

This provides us with a chance to try and establish links on campus between students and staff to challenge the HE bill. This is even more relevant given the fact that the networks that were formed during the 2010 student movement have generally moved on from campus.

The HE bill lays out more attacks on education, with an increased role given to the market and private companies.

SWSS groups are attempting to draw together – or be part of existing – discussions with student unions and UCU branches about how best to mobilise for the 19 November demo.

We should go for big mobilizing meetings where we can, but even more modest organizing meetings can give staff and students the confidence to re-build networks that haven't existed since 2010/2011.

So for example comrades in Lancaster helped initialize a successful mobilizing meeting at the end of October, with Mark Campbell (sacked by London Met) also speaking at it. This should be repeated

wherever possible.

One aspect of the NUS leadership have been the disgusting attacks on Malia Bouattia as being antisemitic. We stand with her against such slurs.

The campaign launched by the right for individual student unions to disaffiliate has so far been generally unsuccessful. A more damaging factor has been the way in which the right have attempted to smear anyone who supports Palestinian rights as being antisemitic.

We are clear in SWSS that we absolutely oppose any form of antisemitism but that anti-Zionism is not the same as antisemitism.

We support the Palestinian resistance, as well as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

This term we have seen student unions cancel room bookings for SWSS meetings on 'How can Palestine be free?' and complain that the posters advertising such meetings could be offensive.

This is a worrying trend and can only be countered by political clarity on anti-Zionism and antisemitism, while standing firm against antisemitism.

SWSS

What does all this mean for SWSS? The above factors have meant that socialism is back on the agenda on campuses. There is an openness to socialist politics not witnessed for a number of years. This has been reflected in the response we got at Freshers Fair this year.

We estimate that nationally around 2,700 students left their contact details as being interested in SWSS during Freshers Fairs, with about 1,700 SWs sold as well.

One feature of Freshers was that we had a good response at universities where we haven't built for a number of years. For example:

- At Queen Mary's London, 260 students left their details for SWSS and 97 SWs were sold at Freshers.
- At Kings College London 171 students left their details for SWSS
- Over 140 students joined Bristol SWSS at the Freshers fair.
- At Glasgow, over 360 students left their details as interested in SWSS and 290 copies of SW were sold.
- During 3 days of Manchester University Freshers Fair, 248 people left their details for SWSS, and 198 copies of SW were sold.

These figures also show the potential to sell SW to students, which is something branches and SWSS groups should continue throughout the term.

Since the start of term, we've also had significant numbers of students coming to our SWSS meetings. Places such as Manchester SWSS have continued the impressive meetings they've had for the last few years, with between 25-40 students

consistently coming to the SWSS meeting each week.

Students have been attracted to meetings with titles such as "Is socialism possible?" "Refugee crisis: why we say open the borders", "How powerful is the media?", "Can Corbyn beat the establishment?", "A rebel's guide to Malcolm X".

SWSS groups have begun meeting at new places. For example, Bristol SWSS have had meetings of between 20-35 students each week since the start of term. Queen Mary's consistently get 25 or more at their weekly SWSS meeting. And at UCL we've had between 14-20 students coming to the meetings there each week.

This is in addition to places where we have built for a number of years like Kingston and Sussex Uni.

Without getting ahead of ourselves, this should give us confidence about our ability to relate to and engage with students.

Smaller branches have also played an important role in having a regular presence at local universities.

So Portsmouth, Nottingham and Bolton branches have all had a strategy of doing a regular sale at their local university whilst getting students to branch meetings and involved in activity. This has allowed them to hold SWSS meetings which students have come to and joined the SWP.

Recruitment and development of student members

The key question for us is how can we go from having an audience for socialist ideas to developing a new layer of revolutionaries? How can we develop a new student cadre? In the eyes of the student office, there are three elements to this: activity, recruitment and theoretical development

Activity: As mentioned before, the low level of struggle for the past few years means that the majority of students have little experience of regular political activity and campaigning.

We should always attempt to bring students to branch meetings and local picket lines. These are important in giving a taste of politics outside the student bubble. However the key priority for us is anti-racism.

In the coming months, SUTR has put out calls for regular activity to confront the rise of racism, including local meetings, vigils for refugees, protests against racist attacks and so on.

These give us an important opportunity for us to encourage students to take part in regular anti-racist campaigning – stalls, leafletting, posterings etc.

By getting students involved with the anti-racist movement we can give them a sense of being involved in a mass movement, and also win them to the idea that mass mobilisations on the ground are the best way to win change.

Recruitment: While it is true that big numbers of students are drawn to Labour and Corbyn, we should not be conservative about asking people to join the SWP.

There is a significant minority of students who identify with Corbyn but are aware of the need to mobilise to a greater extent than what is offered by the Labour Party.

In the first week of October, 19 students joined the SWP. This was a week where we were involved in building the fantastic national Stand Up To Racism conference, but where we also held big SWSS meetings on a few campuses that took on the big ideological questions.

The lesson from that is that if the party looks good – involved in wider initiatives but with attention to detail about SWP events – we can be confident in asking students to join us.

Development: The most difficult part is developing members to play a key role in SWSS groups, branches and the party nationally.

One part of this is theoretical development. At the New Members Dayschool in March this year, over 150 students came from branches around the country.

Marxism 2016 involved hundreds of students, many of whom played a role on the team for the event.

In London, the student office has set up the Young Members Caucus, which is discussed in more details elsewhere in this bulletin. This takes place once a month and provides a regular space for newer and younger members to discuss our ideas in more depth and at a higher level than you might get in a branch meeting, but also to integrate them into the Party's political interventions. Districts should attempt to replicate this at a local level.

We also need to encourage new student members to read, in particular our publications. SW, Socialist Review and the ISJ should all be available at SWSS meetings as well as relevant books and pamphlets to the title.

Conclusion

All this shows that there is a big potential for us to build on campuses. Not only is there a significant audience for socialist ideas, but it's crucial that a mass movement against racism takes a hold in the universities and colleges. Each branch needs a strategy about how to do this

On a basic level we should establish a regular SWP presence on as many campuses as possible.

Where we have one or two students, we should go for SWSS meetings if we can. If it's difficult to get a room on campus, we should find a venue nearby.

Bristol SWSS meetings are technically off campus, but they get between 25-30 students every week! Portsmouth SWSS haven't managed to get a room on campus, but have hosted regular meetings in a venue nearby.

Even if we don't have SWSS groups, every branch should think about having a regular campaigning stall where we sell SW, have good leaflets for branch meetings and build local campaigns such as SUTR.

If you don't have a local uni in your district, make sure you do lunchtime sales at the 6th form – several branches have 6th formers regular coming to their meetings.

We therefore need to think how to make branch meetings attractive – do we have good publicity? Is the venue near campus? Are the meeting titles interesting to students? Branches can be organizing hubs for the local area, and we want students to be part of them.

The initiatives called for by Student SUTR aims to build a network of anti-racists on every campus.

SWP branches should approach local SUTR groups – and other student groups on campuses – to set up SUTR stalls.

Local SUTR groups have had success in approaching student union officers and secretaries to get involved in local SUTR campaigns, and come to organizing and public meetings.

We should also encourage local SUTR groups to set up events on campus around Islamophobia awareness month, the winter appeal to Calais and the other events called by Student SUTR.

It is still early on in the term but it seems as if there are significant opportunities for us in the universities and colleges. A mass movement against racism that can counter Prevent and Islamophobia, can build solidarity with refugees and defend the rights of international and EU students is hugely important.

We can play a role within student SUTR to attempt to build that movement. At the same time we can win a new layer of students to revolutionary politics.

BUILDING AMONG STUDENTS IN MANCHESTER

Manchester SWSS

This university year has begun well building SWSS in Manchester. The freshers fairs were full of students who you could see were very enthused around the prominence of Corbyn but also engaged seriously, and at most points agreed with the arguments we as revolutionaries were putting forward, especially around the issue of refugees and anti-racism.

For example 289 students joined SWSS at the University of Manchester and 115 at Manchester Metropolitan University – and over the freshers week we sold 250+ SWs.

The first few meetings have had really good attendance as well with 30-40 people

coming to most meetings with around 15 regulars who provide the backbone to the group on campus.

Again a lot of the questions asked at the meetings were framed around the Corbyn experience; i.e. Under socialism would we need Trident? Isn't deselection a form of accountable democracy? Why aren't SWSS within Labour?

These questions were useful in the meetings as it created a real debate. But also, importantly, it shows that the wider left on campus were coming to SWSS to debate and engage with us over important political questions such as: Is socialism possible? / Police, racism and the state / Is the media all powerful?

To engage the rest of the left in a dialogue has to be a task for revolutionaries in the age of Corbynism. This is just as important on the campuses.

We have recruited 6 students so far this term. It helps that in our meetings we are raising the wider political questions of capitalism, not just focusing on the inner machinations of momentum or Labour.

Weekly SWs sales have also been key to interacting with new students on campus – and the same 8 or so students keep coming back to buy the paper.

Outside of Manchester Labour Students, we seem to be the only political society which has weekly meetings and regular activity.

Students have also been attending central branch meetings on the Thursday evening. We have been able to create a hub of activity especially around anti-racism, that makes it easier to pull more students around us.

One key example of this is, for the last two weeks, we have leafleted the local mosques for the local Stand Up To Racism rally. This was a brilliant experience.

Last June SWSS was part of a group of students from the two universities in Manchester (UoM and MMU) who went on the convoy to Calais on the 18th June. There was real anger that we couldn't deliver aid to the "Jungle" camp.

When we returned there was a meeting to organise a Student Stand Up To Racism group. This involved students from Labour, SWSS, full-time sabbatical officers and other campaign groups on campus.

It was important for us as students to be part of the national Stand Up To Racism organisation. This group has really taken off this year with regular meeting of between 20-30 students.

Not unsurprisingly the backbone of the Student SUTR group were the students who attended the SUTR conference in London and the Student session.

There are plans for a rally on campus this November for Islamophobia awareness month, an anti-Prevent event at MMU, and plans for the next convoy in December.

Much like the rest of wider society there are a large number of people on university campuses at the moment who want to fight racism.

There is therefore a huge audience out there for building student SUTR groups. As SWSS we are part of the Student SUTR but regularly have discussions with other members about wider politics but at the same time focusing on fighting racism as a united group of students.

There is clearly an appetite among students both inside and outside SWSS to understand the contradictions of the capitalist system we live under.

We can provide an analysis which begins to answer the questions that students have – but we also need to show that having a SWSS group on campus actively makes a difference to university life – whether it's campaigning for Palestine, the refugees or against racist scapegoating.

BUILDING AT QUEEN MARY

Nadia (Queen Mary)

After joining the party in March, I started doing paper sales on campus at Queen Mary with the Tower Hamlets branch and the student office. We often had a very positive response from the students, particularly around the question of refugees.

From there, we began collecting names and details for a Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) and became a registered society at the end of August.

When it came to the fresher's fair, while we were allocated a stall by the Student Union inside the campus buildings, we also had a stall outside of the campus entrance and over the two days had almost 270 sign ups to the SWSS and 100 papers sold.

Again, the refugee crisis was one of the main matters that attracted students to our stalls during the fresher's fair, alongside concerns about racism and Islamophobia after Brexit – and the future of the Labour party, as at that point Jeremy Corbyn had not been re-elected as leader of the Labour Party.

To follow the party's intervention at the Fresher's Fair, the next week we held an informal meeting in one of the cafés on campus to talk to people about the society and answer any questions or hear any ideas about activities to get involved in on campus.

Later that week, we had our first society meeting, titled 'Is socialism possible?', which we had built for through mass texting and emailing (mainly from the sign up sheets from the fresher's fair), poster all over campus and a lunchtime stall on campus on the same day as the meeting. We delivered 28 students to the first meeting.

Five weeks into the semester, we have had similar turnouts to our meetings and have been able to recruit ten students to

the party, as well as getting involved in the Dubs Day of Action, the Stand Up To Racism conference (and the following Student Stand Up To Racism organizing meetings), attending Tower Hamlets branch meetings and helping with the branches paper sales in Whitechapel on Fridays.

While there have been issues on campus, particularly from other societies and the Student Union, we've managed to maintain a strong presence at Queen Mary. Enough people regularly attend our meetings – through our consistency in building the society and keeping regular contact with people.

Now we need to develop a sense of ownership of the society from the new members. This means encouraging them to lead in the caucus, to poster on campus, to read for the meetings and so on.

STUDENT WORK IN BRISTOL

Astrid (Bristol) and Simon (student office)

Comparing the Bristol Uni SWSS of 2015-16 to the academic year of 2016-17 so far shows a political sharpening and pull to the left for a sizeable number of students that Bristol comrades intend building with.

Last year the SWSS averaged 10-15 with some good conversations, 2 students and 1 young staff member joining and approximately 100 on the text group. Very limited united front activity and regular SWSS stalls with one student participating.

This year, SWSS is averaging 28 attendees with a positive buzz around the meetings and some good politics in the contributions and debates.

Seven students joined at one SWSS meeting on 'Why we say refugees welcome here' and five students have played an active role with SWSS campaign stalls.

A core of 4 students are playing a role in leading SWSS with two caucuses held: deciding chairs and meeting titles, making announcements and supporting SUTR and N19 UCU/NUS demo building.

SWSS students have also played important role in SUTR - routine SWSS stalls with flyering for the conference plus helping a SUTR stall meant 17 students went to the SUTR conference and SWSS students played a role along with SUTR students to build a Dubs Amendment Demo that 80 students came along to.

Based on conversations with students this contrast between the two academic periods appears to be attributable to Corbyn legitimising and giving confidence to the students socialist ideas as well as their individual experience and knowledge of political conditions beyond the UK; the

core students are from the US, Austria and Spain.

Those attending SWSS this year don't necessarily consider themselves 'the political student' but rather, as one student said, 'it's cool to be political on campus again'.

Another factor is that the branch has also increased its knowledge and experience of working with students and SWSS from last year.

Going forward Bristol has a three point strategy:

- 1) Building SWSS to involve and give ownership to an even wider layer of students and recruit further.
- 2) Engage with united front activity, most notably supporting the SUTR campus event planned for the end of November.
- 3) Provide opportunities for those involved in SWSS to develop politically confidence and experience with educationals, caucuses and campaign stalls.

Attention to detail is crucial: around SWSS this means ensuring communication includes postering, flyering, Facebook invites, text group, contact sheets and individual calls and making sure SWSS space has posters up and materials set up.

In terms of building and being active this includes united front activity most notably supporting the SUTR student event end of Nov and building for the N19 demo.

In terms of building our cadre this includes encouraging SWSS students to be involved in SWSS stalls, take ownership of the detail of SWSS, having individual coffees and chats to understand where they're at and suggesting books, articles and Marxism sessions to look at.

There also needs to be links with the branch - either students attending or branch members at SWSS (with branch members being attentive to the length of their contribution, and being approachable).

There is a palpable sense of politics around campus and an appetite for socialist politics. Our politics, activities and the opportunities to play a role that SWSS offers as well and united front opportunities is a key area to build in this coming period. Below is a contribution from a new member:

Astrid, Bristol University:

During my first week at the University of Bristol, I attended a SWSS meeting on Robin Hood.

I had only recently moved to Bristol from Austria and had been looking for a chance to become active in politics in the UK.

That first night at the Robin Hood, I got the chance to talk to like-minded people about the refugees welcome movement, the feminist movement, the pride movement, the BLM movement, about Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders and so many more issues that I was passionate about.

SWSS and the SWP soon became an integral part of my life abroad and one of the most important experiences I have made here.

I got the chance to chair meetings and contribute to them, participate in demonstrations and campaign at the stalls. I was welcomed into a fast-moving political revolution and invited to help shape it.

I believe that socialism is the answer to the struggles the world is experiencing right now, and as a member of the SWP, I am excited to be part of this revolution.

BUILDING BOLTON UNIVERSITY SWSS

Adam (Bolton)

Summary:

- Bolton SWSS deliberate attempt at relating to younger, multi-racial audience
- Detailed planning started in early August
- Youngest SWP member in 40s, oldest 72!
- Two SWSS meetings on campus – 6 students at first, 8 at second
- Potential to build autonomous SWSS group, but a lot of hard work ahead

Bolton SWP is a small but well rooted and stable branch. Its members are a key part of movement in Bolton. Members of Bolton SWP are respected as prominent trade unionists. They are leading members of the trades council, and of the anti-racist and the anti war movements.

Nevertheless, the SWP branch shares a weakness with the wider left in Bolton, which is that its membership is largely old and white. This is despite its strong links with the local Muslim community developed over a number of years of consistent anti-racist work.

In order to address this weakness, we have made a conscious decision to focus on Bolton University, and attempt to build a SWSS group. We have done this entirely from the outside, using experience gained from participating in building SWSS in the Manchester universities.

The planning for this started in August. We found out when term started and when the new students registered. We ran stalls on the two registration days which were a week before the term started, and then for two days in the first week of term.

We had a mix of working branch members, retired branch members, non-members and people from the district helping. The youngest of these comrades is in their forties, the oldest is a 72 year old retired teacher!

On the very first day, we went in to the student's union to ask how to register a student society. It turned out that while we

did need a certain number of members, the key was having a small number of officers of the society.

In the first two weeks, we signed up about a hundred members and also managed to find three people who agreed to become officers of the society.

This meant that we were able to get a stall in the one day freshers day event, and also have SWSS meetings in the university itself.

While the initial plan was to have SWSS meetings every week or every two weeks, the reality has been a little more ad-hoc than that.

The simple mechanics of agreeing a time, getting a room booked, and then building properly for a meeting are not simple when you're setting up a SWSS group from scratch.

Since the beginning of term, we have had two meetings. The first was on "Is Socialism Possible?" and had 6 students attending, as well as a few SWP members.

The second was "Why we say refugees and migrants are welcome here" and had 8 students.

As well as planning fortnightly SWSS meetings, we are looking to build a Stand Up To Racism event with the Afro-Caribbean Society, the LGBT society and the Climate Change society, who we have met in the last few weeks.

While there is no formally registered Islamic Society, we intend to use our contacts with MEND and Mosques in Bolton to contact the Islamic students who we know pray together and organise on the campus.

Of course, the overall Corbyn effect has made it much easier to talk about socialism. But it has also had a direct effect, in that some of the staff in the Students Union are Momentum members, which has at times helped us overcome some of the bureaucratic issues in setting up a new society.

It would however be wrong to give an overly positive picture of this process. Of the three original officers, all of them have dropped out permanently or temporarily, due to various health and family issues.

Bolton University has a high proportion of students commuting in, working, or with childcare responsibilities, so it is not easy to get to meetings. We have not yet got any student to help on a SWSS stall. I think only one student has attended both SWSS meetings (although he is interested in coming to branch meetings). So we are a long way from establishing an autonomous SWSS group.

However, all of the existing SWP members that have been involved in this work have been genuinely excited by the political discussion and the potential for building SWSS at Bolton University.

We have made a good start, but a lot more work will be needed to build an autonomous and stable student organisation.

YOUNG MEMBERS CAUCUS: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR RETENTION

Tom (student office)

In March this year the student office held a young members dayschool in London, the day was a success with roughly 150 people from around the country coming together to discuss everything from the Origins of ISIS to Corbynism. This took us by surprise! We didn't necessarily realise the extent to which there were students and young members in branches across the country.

In London, mass mobilisations over racism, climate change, austerity and war had brought us into contact with large numbers of young people, some of which we had recruited.

This began to pose a problem: how can we recruit, but crucially hold young members in the organisation when the age profile of branches is not necessarily that low, and there is a very high level of ideological debate amongst young people.

Corbynism, arguments about racism, the role of class and so on require argument and debate, but also crucially discussion about how ideas are implemented and how they help or hinder movements for change.

From this problem, we developed the idea of a Young Members Caucus. The student office pulled together a list of young members and students in discussion with the branches.

We then set about organising the first meeting on the Russian Revolution. However, we did not want it to be simply about discussing ideas, we also wanted it to help involve newer members in the activity of the organisation, and to think about how a political organisation can shape the development of political movements, such as Stand Up To Racism on campuses and elsewhere.

Since its foundation, the London Young Members Caucus has had six meetings, opening with discussions of: prospects for Socialists, the Russian Revolution, Class in the 21st Century, Trotsky and the United Front, Marxism and Racism, and Reform or Revolution.

There has been a mixture of speakers from the Central Committee and the Student Office.

There has also been caucus discussions of: Stand Up To Racism, Love Music Hate Racism, SWP democracy, building the People's Assembly demonstration, the NUS/UCU United for Education demonstration and plans for the centenary of the Russian Revolution.

The Young Members Caucus also been crucial in pulling together sizeable SWSS

blocs on demonstrations such as the April 16 PA demo, July 16 joint SUTR/PA demo and others. We are also planning a LYMC day of action in solidarity with the Southern Rail strike.

Bookmarks have also provided book-stalls at each of the caucuses.

Recently, we have begun to develop the format of the caucus – looking at discussions in smaller groups and with focussed question, and trying create further space for young members for suggestions for or questions about activity.

Also, the expansion of the list (recruiting more young members) has made it increasingly difficult to properly maintain.

This means that some branches – where recruitment of younger members has been successful – will have to begin to take more responsibility for the process of retention and development of younger members.

This is not to say that the LYMC will cease to exist – in fact, the Student Office are looking at developing a Northern caucus – but to say that in branches where 1-2 young members has become 4-5 or more, each branch needs to develop a strategy of retention which involves ideological development and local activity around campaigns such as SUTR. The young members' caucus should be part of, but not the whole of this strategy.

The question of recruitment, retention and development is one that we will have to continue to return to, and the methods we use for this are not set in stone, but the Young Members Caucus is a good example of how we can do this. Below are three contributions from members of the Caucus on their experience of it.

Saba (Ealing):

The monthly London young member's caucuses have been really useful. Not all branches are full of young people, a lot of the time there's only one or two young people in a branch and it can put pressure on young member's to organise other young people.

But the caucuses regularly get 20-30 or more young members together and it's good to see that you're not on your own and there's a growing layer of young people in the party.

The discussions have been good. It's an environment where you can ask anything without feeling pressure to talk really theoretically.

At the same time I've found the caucuses have helped me become more solid and confident at arguing with students at my own university.

It helps root you in the party more too. I'm bringing a new SWSS member there so that they can see the wider layers of members and become more active in the party and in Uni.

It's been really valuable having caucuses like this.

Andriana (Haringey) :

The Young Member's Caucus has honestly been a fun, refreshing and interesting experience for everyone involved.

We meet up often enough so that we're a nice tight knit group of people, but not too often so that we get bored of the caucus experience.

It's really informative and thoroughly enjoyable as we get to hang out with people our own age and ask the questions we're too shy to in our branch meetings.

It helps us learn things that are vital to our cause and provides us with political ammunition to use in our everyday lives.

The only criticism I have is the length! Sometimes the caucus can drag on for a long time and people become restless.

Other than that, there are only positive things to say about the experience. It has been fundamental to our political development as well as social – I've never had better friends!

From the demos, to the meetings and to the pub afterwards, we're surrounded by people who share our politics and want us to grow.

It's a supportive and nurturing environment and I genuinely couldn't ask for anything more. The caucuses are something to look forward too, and will hopefully draw new young members in the future!

Nadia (Tower Hamlets):

As both a new and young member to the party, I think the Young Members Caucus has been valuable in two ways.

It politically develops our ideas on topics which would otherwise be assumed within the context of branch meetings.

This mainly tends to be meetings on elements of the party's political tradition such as Trotsky's United Front method, the lessons we draw from the Russian Revolution and so on.

Since the young members are spread so thinly across the branches, the Young Members Caucus has been important to us, not only as it means we get to know the other young and new comrades.

This, I think, has played a huge part in the success of the Socialist Worker Student Societies on campuses, as during (and after) the caucuses, we share our experiences with one another as well as discuss future things we'd like to build, for example how we can help support the Student Stand Up To Racism convoy to Calais on 10 December.

ARGUMENTS ABOUT CONFRONTING RACISM

Central Committee

A steep rise in racism and different strategies for resisting and opposing it have been thrown into sharp focus by events in the second half of 2016.

Racist violence

The most obvious, brutal and striking example of racism has been the violence experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people. We have witnessed an alarming spike in racist attacks since June.

Labour MP Jo Cox, a committed anti racist was murdered in final days of a campaign that was marked by racist scapegoating by both the official Leave and Remain campaigns.

Since then the incidents reported have included an attack that destroyed the foetus of a Muslim women and possibly the murderous assault on a Polish man in Harlow.

The other dramatic but more positive development we have seen in the response to the continuing police brutality on the United States. Deaths at the hands of the police are routine. It has been reported that someone is killed by the police every 28 hours. At the time of writing 883 have died in 2016. 202 of those, a hugely disproportionate number have been black men

As we witnessed before in 2014 after teenager Michael Brown's killing in Ferguson, Missouri the simmering anger at such atrocities occasionally spills over into angry protests. It was at that time that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was established and similar protests erupted onto the streets again this summer following the summary executions of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.

The significance of these deaths is that they are at the hands of the state in the form of the police, the very organisation that ordinary people are expected to look to for protection and respect as the upholders of law and order.

The actions of the police highlights the fact that institutional racism permeates from the top of society. Racism does not simply come from violent extremists on society's margins or from excluded working class estates and communities.

Protest in Britain

Nor is harassment, bullying and violence the exclusive preserve of the police in the United States. Here in Britain there were a wave of BLM protests in towns and cities including London, Manchester, Cardiff, Bristol and Leeds.

In the first instance those marches were in solidarity with protesters in the United

States, something that socialists should surely welcome, applaud and encourage.

But international solidarity was by no means the only mobilising factor. Those who marched also did so because they are acutely aware that police brutality afflicts BME communities here. In Liverpool several hundred angry protesters marched following the fatal restraint of 18 year old Mzee Muhammad at Liverpool One Shopping Centre.

On the protests in London it was our comrades, who drew the link between deaths in the US and those of Cynthia Jarrett, Joy Gardner, Roger Sylvester, Christopher Alder, Sean Rigg, Smiley Culture and Mark Duggan. These arguments were warmly applauded. Later the tasering to death of former professional football player Dalian Atkinson highlighted the impunity with which the police treat black people with whom they come into contact.

The violence of the police is the most dramatic, immediately oppressive and obvious example of institutional racism but it by no means the only form. Rather it is simply the tip of a huge iceberg.

Institutional racism in Britain

In August 2016 just as the protests were beginning to subside, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the official body charged with responsibility for monitoring such race equality issues published a report entitled: 'Healing a divided Britain: the need for a comprehensive race equality strategy'.

The report's headline findings are a damning indictment of the persistence of institutional racism, 17 years after the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report – in which the then Labour Government pledged to drive through a "step change in society's attitudes to race equality."

In short, if you are Black in Britain, you are far more likely to be failed by the education system, criminalised, unemployed and poverty stricken than your White peers.

The challenge facing Black Lives Matter activists

The seemingly intractable nature of institutional racism raises serious questions for activists about how to challenge it.

With regard to the police, in the United States itself some have even advocated taking the law into their own hands, or rather exercising their constitutional right to bear arms in a more robust way, arming themselves and directly challenging oppressive policing.

The most dramatic example of this occurred in Dallas when a sniper, Micah Xavier Johnson, ambushed and assassinated five officers. Elsewhere there have

been efforts to revive the Black Panther Party. Johnson had himself apparently “liked” the New Black Panther Party on Facebook and associated with a spin off organisation for 6 months.

As the demise of the original Black Panthers in a hail of bullets and subterfuge demonstrated, such vigilante action cannot succeed. Johnson himself was eventually blown up by a bomb following his own onslaught.

Nobody has seriously suggested importing such tactics to Britain but many of the ideas that have gripped activists in the US have been raised here.

As the momentum around the protests inevitably subsided, the initial activity based unity gave way to a fierce debate about whether a BLM moment could really be transformed into a BLM movement and if so how.

The founders of the BLM Movement, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi identify themselves as “three queer Black women, veterans of labor, immigrants rights, and other social justice organising”. As such therefore they have experience of multiple forms of oppression. Furthermore it is clear that they have an understanding of the all encompassing impact of oppression and the need for a transformative world view. For example, Cullors argues:

When our political activism isn't rooted in a theory about transforming the world, it becomes narrow; when it is focused only on individual actors instead of larger systemic problems, it becomes short sighted. We do have to deal with the current crisis in the short term. That's important. We have to have solutions for people's real life problems, and we have to allow people to decide what those solutions are. We also have to create a vision that's much bigger than the one we have right now.

At the heart of this debate are a number of key questions, among them:

- (i) What are the roots of racism?
- (ii) Can racism ever be beaten?
- (iii) What sort of society should we aim to create?

Cullors herself is adamant that “An abolitionist society is not based on capital. I don't think you can have a capitalist system and also an abolitionist system” and she advocates a society “rooted in providing for and supporting the self determination of communities.

Broadly, this is a perspective that we as socialists would agree with. The challenge lies in making these demands concrete and building the struggles that can take them forward.

As those comrades who have involved themselves in the activities and arguments that have emerged in Britain have discovered these ideas and this territory is seriously contested.

Black nationalism

Among those who would challenge us are people who align themselves with some form of Black Nationalism. Black Nationalism has existed for a long time in different forms from the reactionary ideas pursued on occasion by the Nation of Islam, opening negotiations with fascists on the grounds that they were more sincere than liberal integrationist whites, to the revolutionary ideas of the Black Panthers and Revolutionary Union Movement.

There is an understandable immediate common sense attraction in Black Nationalist ideas. All Black people may be subject to and have an understanding of racism. Barack Obama was a community organiser in Chicago whose racial heritage is still challenged by racist opponents. Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr was detained by police whilst trying to enter his own home and businessmen can be stopped in the City of London for “driving while Black”.

Similarly the EHRC report cited above highlights the fact that even when Black people bust the myth, achieve educational success and gain degrees, their employment and earning potential is significantly less than that of their White peers.

Given such circumstances it is understandable for Black people to think that the key divide in society is that of race, that all White people benefit and that the key challenge for Black people is to unite against all Whites.

No automatic unity

Those advocating such a perspective have discovered however that there is no automatic unity among people from BME communities. Indeed, the myriad terms that have been thrown up among them “BME”, “BAME”, “Ethnic Minority” are a reflection of this.

During an earlier period of struggle, notably the 1970s when the first generations of children born to immigrant parents were coming of age and the likes of the National Front were on the march, the use of the word “Black” was broad and inclusive.

In particular, young and increasingly politically active people from African, African Caribbean and Asian backgrounds increasingly realised that they suffered a common experience at the hands of the police and organised racists.

The use of the term “Black” was therefore intended not simply to define colour but to denote and develop racial solidarity. Proudly recognising and identifying oneself as “Black” was a defiant political statement.

Moreover it was a declaration that through hard work and struggle drew in the support of socialists, workers and trade unions.

It was at that time and in those circumstances that the National Front was driven back, multicultural, anti-racist education was pioneered, jobs in the public sector

were secured and funds allocated for community activities. Black History Month (BHM), an idea first developed in the US was one of the outcomes of those struggles.

As events this BHM have illustrated such “Political Blackness” has long since been eroded. A poster to promote Kent University's BHM celebrations featuring pop star Zayn Malik and London Mayor Sadiq Khan provoked a furious row not for the justifiable reason that they are unworthy recipients of praise but because they are of Asian origin rather than African or African Caribbean.

The argument is a reflection of the fact that in the years after those successful struggles people from immigrant communities were actively encouraged to identify and define themselves by reference to what set them apart from other groups. There is a contradiction in this. The experience of racism is not automatically the same regardless of one's history or background.

For example it has long since been acknowledged that the exam success of children from Chinese and Indian background compares favourably with that of their African Caribbean, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and White working class peers.

People from different backgrounds are entitled to reclaim and celebrate their heritage and fight for the resources that allow them to do so.

The struggles of the 1970s and 80s succeeded to the extent that they secured this recognition and some resources for grass-roots activity.

Multiculturalism was pioneered from below and not (as its opponents would suggest cynically and mistakenly) imposed by the state from above on unsuspecting and unwilling communities.

The unfortunate consequence however was that it helped to erode the solidarity that had been achieved by the development of political blackness.

Different groups found themselves competing with each other for limited resources rather than fighting together for a larger share of funds from a public purse that that had paid into. In those circumstances there was an incentive to promote one's own organisation or community as more deserving than others.

Why does this matter and what can be done?

The era in which such reforms were won has long since passed. The jobs and community projects have largely disappeared. As recession and decline has gripped the economy the impact of institutional racism has meant that Black communities have been worst affected as the EHRC report acknowledges. Elsewhere the growth of Islamophobia has had a dramatic impact. The huge increase in stops and searches over the past decade are in large part due to the so called “War on Terror”.

The real material deprivation that this

has led to can in turn encourage more long established communities to turn against those that are newly arrived.

There is anecdotal evidence that some members of African Caribbean and Asian communities favoured Brexit in part because they felt that they and their families were being disadvantaged compared to workers from Europe who are currently entitled to live and work in Britain.

Our history

The arguments that have emerged in this new climate are ones that comrades in the SWP should feel confident that we can intervene in. As we sought to illustrate in our 2013 publication 'Say It Loud', there is a very strong theory and practice that we can point to.

(i) We were heavily involved in the struggles of the 20th century that led to real changes. As various 40th anniversary commemorations have shown, the SWP played a leading role in establishing the Anti Nazi League and Rock Against Racism which played a pivotal role in marginalising the Nazis and winning a generation of young people to multiculturalism and anti-racism.

(ii) In workplaces, our members built the ANL but also the wider struggles that helped win the reforms that challenged institutional racism.

(iii) In the 1990s we supported campaigns such as the Stephen Lawrence Family Campaign and deaths in custody campaigns arguing for trade union support and funding.

The decline in support and funding for multicultural and anti-racist activities and projects highlights two critically important points which we have always argued namely that racism cannot simply be reformed away and those reforms that have been won can be lost in times of austerity.

Neither of those facts mean that we should not fight for reforms or defend those that have been won in the past. It does however place an increased premium on arguing for Black and White working class unity and revolutionary transformation.

The row over Zayn Malik and Sadiq Khan is illustrative of some of the issues that have emerged as BLM activists have tried to get to grips with the issues facing us today. In the London based WhatsApp group set up in the aftermath of the first wave of protests there were a series of divisive rows about who could define themselves as "Black".

Those involved were rightly critical of people, who sought to argue that the rallying call should be "All Lives Matter". Whilst that may be true in the abstract, it fails to recognise the specificity of racism.

What followed however were arguments that White people should be excluded because they don't suffer racism. That was

problematic enough but worse still, others objected to the involvement of Asians on the grounds that the issues that kick started BLM don't affect Asians.

Such arguments are simply untrue, Asians do increasingly suffer police harassment, school exclusions, unemployment, overcrowding and poverty. The effect of these rows within the WhatsApp group was to demoralise and drive out a sizeable number of previously enthusiastic activists.

An alternative argument that is deployed acknowledges that whilst Asians do suffer oppression "they" have their own businesses and community organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and Federation of Student Islamic Societies to assist them whereas there are no such representative bodies for African and African Caribbean communities.

What is proposed therefore are separate Black organisations to deal with "our" issues that can then seek progressive alliance with others who suffer racism. Whilst this may be true, the marginalisation of Muslim communities in consultations about the government's Prevent agenda shows that they continue to be excluded and demonised.

Meanwhile the increasing number of physical, verbal and media attacks upon Polish and other East European communities demonstrates that today, skin colour is by no means the only reason why people find themselves coming under fire from racists or demonised by the press and politicians.

As socialists of course we can have no objection to Black people setting up their own organisations. Where self organised groups do exist we should be happy to work with them.

In North London for example comrades have a friendly working relationship with Day-Mer, a Turkish and Kurdish community organisation.

Elsewhere over the past 3 years we have sought to encourage people from Polish, Irish, Jewish, Traveller and other backgrounds to mobilise and have a high profile presence on SUTR demonstrations.

The plain truth is however that there are few established Black organisations of any weight that have been sustained and had a consistent involvement in political activity.

This may be explained in part by the fact that many people involve themselves in smaller activities at a local level such as running a supplementary school or providing tailored resources for their community. Again, we have no particular criticism of such initiatives. Indeed where they exist, getting to know the people who run them would be a very useful way for SWP branches to sink local roots.

As the experience of the Black Panthers who ran schools, education and medical programmes demonstrates however, such activities are onerous and have the effect of drawing activists away from the wider struggle.

Our analysis

What defines our politics is a Marxist understanding of the roots of racism and its changing nature as capitalism has developed. This allows us to raise a number of concrete arguments:

- (i) That white people are not inherently racist.
- (ii) That racism emanated from the top of society in order to serve the needs and interests of the ruling class.
- (iii) That it persists in order to serve the interests of a class that needs to divide working class people in order to maintain their power and has therefore evolved as capitalism has changed and developed.

A further critical feature of capitalism however is that it necessarily brings people from different backgrounds together in workplaces. In such circumstances, it is possible to build the kind of unity that can challenge racist myths and stereotypes.

The level of integration of Black and White people in Britain is one of the key reasons why Black Nationalist organisations have never gained a great purchase.

It is quite simply not the case that Britain has "sleep walked to segregation" as the sometime leader of the EHRC Trevor Phillips frequently suggests.

Governments, councils and employers have created and often cynically promoted conditions that separate people but despite this our communities have come together in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and trade unions. There has been a huge increase in mixed race relationships.

The Black Nationalist rallying call to go back to a hypothetical homeland makes little practical sense to people born and brought up in Britain.

It is by no means automatic that de facto integration will lead to struggle but it is at least possible and the challenge facing us is to help turn that into reality.

The validity of our analysis is vindicated by the fact that reformism, the path that has been pursued as the most plausible alternative, has been tried and has failed spectacularly.

If the American experience teaches us anything it is that the strategy of promoting "Black faces into high places" through electoral politics has failed to deliver substantive change.

In the US, a sizeable Black middle class does have a stake in the system running businesses, controlling local council budgets and running police departments. Their presence is a direct consequence of and product of the courageous struggles of the Civil Rights and Black Power era. Yet, they are often now the very people responsible for the oppressive policing of Black communities.

And of course the US has had a two-term Black president who has presided over a continuing steep and disproportionate decline in the living standards of working

class Black communities.

That spectacular failure opens up space for an argument about what alternatives we should argue and fight for.

Building SUTR

It is these arguments that we should take into the struggles we face today.

The most promising aspect of this summer's BLM protests both in the US and here in Britain was that they were young, vibrant and genuinely multi-racial.

There was also a glimpse of working class solidarity as bus drivers tooted and saluted their support for protesters who disrupted their routes on the streets of London.

More broadly, every major workplace whether it's a school, hospital, local garage, train depot, university or supermarket will have workers from all different backgrounds. This provides the potential for class unity across racial lines.

Building SUTR offers an immediate and attractive way of doing this. Wearing badges, plastering localities with stickers and taking round leaflets and publicity can help to create a widespread anti-racist environment.

Collections for Calais have helped us to identify our comrades as people who are serious about challenging racism.

In the months ahead we have a major job of work to do arguing for colleagues from EU countries to be allowed to stay in the UK once Article 50 kick-starts Britain's departure from the EU.

In colleges and universities we can hold imaginative events, promoting our new 'Rebel's guide to Malcolm X', working with others to host LMHR gigs and organising film shows and Q&As of documentaries like 'The Black Power mixtape' or 'The Black Panthers: vanguard of the revolution'.

The challenge for Black comrades

All comrades matter. Every member of the SWP is an anti-racist and both can and should be a leader in their workplace and local community, but there is a particular challenge for Black comrades to step up to the plate.

It is easier for Black comrades to win an audience among people who may be sceptical about the role of Whites, in the struggle.

In addition it is important for us to demonstrate that we are not the "White left" as Black Nationalist critics would seek to characterise us but rather, a multi-racial organisation within which our Black comrades play a crucial role.

For these reasons it is critically important that in every area our Black comrades engage. Institutional racism means that we will continue to see the police harassing and bullying Black people, we will continue to see people being stopped, searched, criminalised and killed.

We are bound to see protests and angry gatherings such as the explosive meeting that occurred at Tottenham Town Hall in December 2015 following the assassination of Jermaine Baker outside Wood Green Crown Court.

We need to develop a cadre that is strong, rooted and confident to intervene in these events which can draw people into activity and towards our politics.

FROM BLACK LIVES MATTER TO SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

Gary (Haringey)

Harold (Lewisham)

Moyra (Brent & Harrow)

Dean (Hackney East)

The birth of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US found its echo in Britain – it manifested itself at the Westfield die-ins in London following the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, and more forcefully this summer in the wake of the police killings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.

The UK solidarity movement's foundations are readily explained (see Brian and Harold's articles in this month's Socialist Review).

It's true that black people are not being killed by the police in the UK at the rate of one a day as they are in the US, but black people (and a disproportionately large number of working class white people) are being killed nonetheless.

The names Mzee Mohammed and Dalian Atkinson, who both died this year at the hands of the police, spring to mind.

However, the movement that exploded on the streets of Britain this summer cannot be seen merely as a reflection of the US experience. It was also a rebellion against the racism pervasive in British society.

Racists gaining in confidence creates an opposite reaction, and one that is not equal: there is still a majority in this country that supports multiculturalism that can be mobilised to oppose them.

This is important because it helps to explain the anger and the breath of the movement. It should be noted, for example, that the protests in the UK broke less than two weeks after the Brexit vote.

Many agree with us, that racism directed from the top of society is used as a conscious strategy to divide working people.

Follow that through and it means it is in the interests of all working class people to ensure that the fight against racism is prosecuted successfully.

That being so, it makes sense to orientate a strategy for success on a movement

that sees power on the streets and in the workplaces as the opposing power that can undermine racism and push back against the elite. As Malcolm X said: 'power won't back up unless faced with more power'.

Again, many would agree with this general outlook. However, there is another view, dominant in the universities and elsewhere, which rejects this approach – those who adhere to white privilege and white supremacism theory.

Both are more often than not adopted as descriptions of situations rather than a worked-out theoretical practice.

This is not the case for the milieu of 'activists' that grew out of the collapse of the student movement, and who coalesced around initiatives such as the January 2015 Ferguson Solidarity speaking tour in the UK, organised by Defend the Right to Protest.

This milieu was not in evidence for much of the protest movement in the summer although later claimed to be its anointed leaders.

Their top-down approach, relying on small numbers of people doing publicity stunts, attracts the admiration of some but the scorn of others. It's a strategy that flies in the face of the lessons of our movement. It was the mass movement, not small bands of committed individuals, that forced changed in the civil rights movement.

Comparing Rosa Parks to the antics of a bunch of middle class people lying on a runway in east London 'on behalf of black people' was seen by many in the black community as deeply insulting.

The summer events in Britain presented revolutionaries with two important and related tasks: to build the movement and to win a battle of ideas about the best way to fight and ultimately to win people to a strategy that can achieve black liberation.

The balance sheet is mixed but overall our work has hopefully taken the party forward and raised our profile further in the black community.

So how did our work measure up in terms of increasing our influence as measured by paper sales, contacts and new members? Let's have a look.

Our party is a combat organisation modelled on the Bolsheviks. A high level of political understanding combined with a democratic-centralist approach means we are able to intervene quickly and effectively, bringing our forces to bear in a concentrated and united fashion.

That's the theory at any rate. In practice this is not quite how things played out. Comparing our intervention to that of the left as a whole in this country, we were most definitely in the vanguard and the rest (except the for the tiny RCG) were not even on the field of battle.

The same could be said of what we might call the black nationalist old guard. From Lee Jasper to Stafford Scott, there was a complete absence of intervention on any of the protests in London.

Peculiarly, given its policy of studious

abstention from the struggle on the basis that racism cannot be overcome and the best we can do is separate, the only black nationalist organisation that had any organised presence – in London at any rate – was the National of Islam (NoI).

What was even more striking was the lack of intervention from those who claimed to be the leadership of the Black Lives Matter movement in this country: BLM UK.

The composition and class character of the protests

The July protests were the largest mobilisations against police racism by black people – in this sentence I use the word black to refer to people of African descent – on the streets of Britain since the 1970s. The protests were young, working class and predominately black, with a significant turnout of white youth.

From 8th July to early August the protest movement was intense and by the tail-end of what was a rising arc of protest perhaps as many as 30,000 people had been involved in protests around the country.

In London there was a protest almost every day for a week. The largest was on Sunday 10th July in London where up to 5,000 people took part. It was an incredible day. The sight of clenched-fist salutes from bus drivers attested to the class appeal of this movement for racial justice.

Marchers were receptive to our message of class unity to smash racism but our forces on the ground were not large enough to both lead the protest and simultaneously fight to win people to our politics.

Unfortunately, this was a problem that ran through subsequent protests. For example, at the US embassy on the 10 July we convened the rally but no comrades came forward to speak.

At the second rally in the road outside parliament there was only one party member who came forward to speak. Its fair to say that on these protests we did not have enough comrades, black or white, to both help shape the march, run the rallies and to sell SW and recruit as well. It was a 'division of labour' problem that was to persist. These early protests in fact had more white comrades on them than they did black.

Back to the balance sheet – how did we do? No one directly joined the party from the summer activities although there are reports of people who joined indirectly having been influenced by seeing our intervention on social media, TV etc.

Socialist Worker was sold on all the protests but detail is lacking on exactly how many. As for contacts – we continue to be in touch with around 100 people although these are contacts of the BLM group we set up as opposed to party contacts as such, although there is of course no wall between the two.

We can be proud of what the party was

able to achieve but there were missteps that, in our view, we should seek to explain and correct.

Before discussing that, a quick look at the other side, namely the state and the attitude of the British ruling class to the movement.

As far as we are aware there was not a single arrest on any of the demonstrations in London or elsewhere in the country. The police were extremely hands-off and friendly (yuk). They let us block traffic at will and march wherever we wanted to.

Clearly, a decision had been made at the highest levels that the British state was not to be seen to be of the same stripe as its US counterpart.

After the EU referendum shock to the body politic of the British elite, the last thing the government wanted were scenes of black youth being bludgeoned by police going viral around the world. They also of course remembered the country-wide riots triggered by the execution of Mark Duggan in August 2011. They certainly didn't want a re-run of the riots but this time allied to an avowedly political movement.

Centrality of politics and relearning how to lead on the streets

Throughout the 'July Days' a core of comrades were involved. They were a mixture of organisers from the centre and a small number of black comrades from the branches.

Unfortunately, most of the black comrades were not involved until after the protest action had peaked. The comrades from the centre were critical in making sure we had placards on the protests and paper sellers, albeit nowhere near enough in either department.

Because of this, novel methods were used to try and 'capture' people who wanted to be kept in touch with future actions and to get more deeply involved. So, from protest to protest we built up a list of contacts on the Whatsapp messaging app. This meant we were able to keep in touch with people as we hopped from protest to protest. At its peak the Whatsapp group had around 170 members.

Involvement of the branches in London was poor. It looked like many party members were observing from the outside. Even when comrades did make an appearance on protests it was often the case that the paper was not being sold, which meant there was no attempt to politically engage with the new people coming into activity.

There were honorable exceptions, but unfortunately this was the general rule at the peak of the movement.

As we know, movements go up and down very quickly. The BLM outburst was no different in that respect. We got the 'moving quickly' bit right but in doing so seemed to, initially at any rate, leave many party members behind.

There have been a number of arguments advanced to explain this, such as: it's the summer, everyone's away; branch routine comes first; new members need to be protected and the that protests were a flash in the pan like last time (Westfield die-ins) and be over in a couple of days.

The failure of most branches to relate to the movement was not necessarily because of any reticence on the part of individual comrades.

Instead, we can point to a combination of the inability to break from important branch routines that comrades have been fighting hard to establish and to some extent a lack of political clarity and the political confidence that flows from that.

In terms of the number of black comrades in London, we did not punch at our weight let alone above it, although we were the only political force intervening in an organised fashion and as such were still able to pull people around us.

Intervening effectively in the struggle requires political confidence. We need to be able to answer the lie that we are 'the white left'. We have to show in practice that we are a party of black and white revolutionaries. Black comrades leading in the struggle can make it easier for white comrades to intervene.

This shouldn't pose too much of a problem given that our least well-read comrades are likely to know a lot more about the politics of Malcolm X than the average person.

Certainly, political clarity can be achieved from reading books but there really is no substitute for honing our politics in the heat of the struggle – in other words, experience matters.

Having said that, there hasn't exactly been a huge amount of struggle for comrades to relate to vis a vis black nationalism and related issues. So this is something of a Catch-22 situation. Being inexperienced is not a badge of shame. You can't gain experience of a mass picket unless there is a strike with mass picketing. That hasn't happened very much in the past 20 years.

But when such actions do arise, we have to throw ourselves into the struggle – both the experienced and inexperienced comrades – and learn from each other.

Understandably, there is a risk that newer and/or less confident comrades may end up being damaged by the experience.

However, at the beginning of the summer this wasn't an issue – there was no hostility to the SWP. The hard arguments came later, after the protests waned and 'common sense black nationalism' started to come to the fore.

Lets take one concrete example, the London demonstration on 5th August in Altab Ali Park organised by BLMUK as part of its nationwide 'shutdown' action.

What unfolded was an example of gross sectarianism and an opportunity missed. A few hundred people had gathered in the park for the rally. We were there with members of the black lives matter group that grew out of an open meeting we organised

in Dalston attended by around 120 people.

The organisers of the rally decided against having a protest because they didn't want 'the SWP to take it over'.

To forestall there being a demonstration the gathering split up into groups for different areas of London under the guise or 'organising locally' when in fact its sole purpose was to stop there being a march.

Before this point some of our group had secured what they thought was an agreement for a march to start as soon as the 'local organising' had finished. By the time the rally came back together many had gone. After a short closing rally we then began chanting and led people to the park exit, intending to march down the road into the City of London. It didn't happen quite like that.

Instead we were attacked by two Asian women who tried to rip our black lives matter banner out of the hands of the non-SWP members that were carrying as they shouted abuse about rape apologists. This happened in front of the police and the press in an outburst of sectarianism that was beyond the pale.

It should be noted that the Altab Ali demo was unlike the previous protests in London – it was mostly white and not very working class. The fact that the rally was in Altab Ali Park was also deliberate. The reason they hadn't chosen an area with a high African-Caribbean population was because they prefer the swampy autonomist elements that have tried to make that part of Whitechapel their home.

Admittedly, the rally shenanigans had gone on a bit and people had left but so had most of the younger comrades.

When the attack happened it was non-party members (and some of the older comrades) that managed to save the banner and we marched out of the park anyway but only managed to pull a handful of people with us. If we had 20 black comrades on hand the story might have been different.

However, a decision had been made that there were a lot of sectarian nutters on hand so it would be best to get our newer members out of harms way, so to speak. Of course we have to make such judgments from time to time.

But how do we overcome the contradiction highlighted earlier – how to learn from experience when there is no experience? Well, on this occasion, there was experience to be had, in a battle that could have proved instructive.

Previous to the banner incident, comrades on a stall had been verbally assaulted by some of the sectarians and this was taken as a good time to withdraw. Unfortunately that left a smaller number of us in the park to hold the line. In spite of the sectarians, that night about 20 of us still went on to shutdown one of the busiest junctions in London.

From the peak to the trough

The Altab Ali debacle was the opening of the trough phase of the summer protests. The level of activity began to fall in London as protests spread to other parts of the country. And as we all know, when the river stops flowing the filth can rise to the top.

From the meeting in Dalston it was decided to set up a BLM organisation called Black Lives Matter UK. At the time we were unaware of the existence of BLMUK. The organisation was to be dedicated to fighting police brutality here in the UK and to build solidarity with our US sisters and brothers – but trying to keep to that single issue on which we could all agree proved impossible when the level of activity fell.

At this point there was no organisational structure to the group other than the working groups that had been set up at the first Dalston meeting.

It was agreed that the open meetings would be the ultimate decision-making body of the group. In reality, however, because the meetings only took place once a month it was the Whatsapp group that became the focus for discussions. As comrades will probably be aware, social media is good for some stuff and bad for others. There is one thing social media is not very good for – political discussion, especially a messaging platform such as Whatsapp.

Unfortunately discussion on the Whatsapp group became dominated by black nationalist 'common sense' politics around issues such as buying from black businesses, eventually leading to some quite vicious arguments about the role of white people and later red-baiting of the SWP by a small number of individuals.

Those who shouted loudest – or posted the most frequently in this case – started to skew debates. It didn't have to be this way but for it to have been otherwise would have required intervention from the many comrades that were on the group. That didn't happen for reasons I haven't got space to explore.

A second Dalston meeting was held, this time attended by about half the number that were at the first one. At the meeting a steering committee was elected, which in retrospect was probably a mistake. Actually it wasn't elected as such. Those who wanted to be on the committee put forward their names. Among the committee members were two young white women who soon afterwards became the subject of heated debate on the Whatsapp group regarding the meaning of the phrase 'black-led'. It was finally agreed that the committee would be all black. However, once that was agreed they came back for more. Now they were not happy with Asian people being on the committee. This, among other differences, led to a split in the group.

The day after the second Dalston gathering I was invited to a meeting to resolve differences between our group and BLMUK

who claimed to be the 'official' leaders of the movement.

After discussion with another comrade we decided not to go to the meeting as it would be acting behind the back of the rest of the group and its collective decision-making. The meeting went ahead without us. The meeting was in fact convened by the Nation of Islam at one of their premises in south London. In attendance were representatives from BLMUK and three members of our BLM group.

It was after this meeting that the attempted witchhunt of the SWP began. The poison had been injected by some of our ex-members and others of the sectarian left. The people that accuse the SWP of misogyny are quite happy to sit down with the anti-women, anti-semitic NoI. Go figure.

From here on the political differences inside the group made it increasingly dysfunctional. Despite that backdrop we were able to have a very successful Notting Hill carnival intervention. The reactionary black nationalist elements left. Our group is now called the Black Lives Matter Movement as distinct from BLMUK, although these are distinctions the rest of the world is not necessarily aware of.

What lessons can we learn?

Speed

Movements go up and down, often very quickly. We have to be ready to respond equally as quickly and audaciously. The point of having a good routine of paper sales and well-attended branch meetings is to make it easier for us to intervene in events politically, not a hindrance.

For us the struggle is the most important thing not just because it pushes back the racists but also because it is through self-activity that people's ideas change and racist ideas are challenged. We also need to pay careful attention to developing more black women cadre in the party.

Politics

We should be proud of our party's Marxist tradition and be confident that our strategy of building a mass movement from below that looks to the power of the organised working class to smash racism is an effective path forward. The Leninist idea of the unity of theory and practice means we test our ideas in the struggle. We will not develop cadre by 'protecting' comrades from the heat.

Collective

We need to operate collectively on protests with a clear division of labour. Some comrades play key roles in united fronts and therefore have a specific role to play.

Outside of that we need to have comrades allocated to various tasks: stall, paper-selling, placards, recruiting. Also, we are not passive bystanders on protests.

Instead, we should operate in a way that seeks to shape the action – from leading the chanting to determining the best route for the march etc.

Books

We should have made more of Anthony Hamilton's Malcolm X book and our other literature around racism and oppression in addition to our more general politics. People are thirsty for knowledge and are searching for answers. Let's not keep the good news to ourselves.

Confidence

An African comrade who attended the second Dalston meeting made the astute observation that comrades were too defensive about socialist politics. As the Ghanaian comrade put it: 'Why don't we say we are proud black socialists.' He was/is right. Our politics fit far better than those of the black nationalists or the 'left' sectarian moralists.

Leadership

There was a lack of centralised leadership, which is a strange thing to say given we are a democratic centralist organisation.

It was difficult to get anyone to take responsibility for coordinating or directing our work so that comrades across the organisation could get involved and learn from the struggle and help to generalise the best of that experience to the rest of the party.

It is still the case that comrades in London have no idea about what forces (our branches included) were involved in the sizeable protests in the other big cities.

Lessons from the US

We should also learn from the experience of the US. Comrades may not be aware of the fact that Alicia Garcia, one of the founders of BLMUS, was a member of our erstwhile sister organisation the International Socialist Organisation.

Sadly, their Marxism has veered dangerously towards capitulating to identity politics by failing to provide an answer to the dead-end of privilege theory.

In practice the protests that erupted in the UK this summer and those ignited by the ongoing police killings in the US, are not orchestrated by a centralised 'BLM leadership'; they are community rebellions that arise spontaneously.

Nevertheless, BLMUS lays claim to the 'brand' and is now in the throes of creating a 'super NGO' to be funded to the tune of \$100 million.

Some of the money has already started to come in from a liberal millionaire and the Ford Foundation. Their programme reads like a watered-down version of parts of the Black Panther's 10-point programme.

Clearly, making alliances with liberal millionaires is not going to get us any nearer to black liberation. For that we need an anti-capitalist revolutionary organisation – one that takes a leaf out of the

Panther's book but goes beyond it to build a multi-racial revolutionary party; a party rooted in working-class communities, black and white, based on the anti-racist and socialist principle that an injury to one is an injury to all.

Next steps

For now the movement is in abeyance. We will keep our Black Lives Matter Movement group ticking over in the interim and stand ready to respond to further police outrages in the UK and US.

Comrades should see BLMM as a facet of our wider anti-racism work to which we will give shifting emphasis depending on what's going on. Comrades should consider inviting speakers onto SUTR platforms and the like.

We are now working to get the BLM message into schools and colleges and of course into the unions. People may well ask, in your union branch for example, why are there two groups?

We should take that as an opportunity to explain that we (BLMM) are for mass action from below that doesn't see individual white people as the problem but rather the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression that created racism.

We will keep our website, email list and social media efforts up and running.

Capitalism is our common enemy. Let's put the bloodsuckers out of business.

THE SWP AND LGBT+ POLITICS

Central Committee

The combination of the ongoing economic crisis, the surge of support for Corbyn, the vote to leave the EU and the centrality of anti-racism have all shaped the development of LGBT+ politics over the last year.

This is the first time that young people have experienced a Labour leader who has consistently and openly supported LGBT+ rights.

Not only that, but Corbyn has opposed the cuts that have meant greater hardship for this group of often vulnerable people such as reduced access to housing, counselling and education. Not surprisingly the chant 'Tories out, Corbyn in' rang out at Pride parades across the country.

In a continuation of a trend that was noticeable last year, people also took up slogans around refugees and migrants and against racism.

The Pink Bus to Calais, an initiative pushed by comrades aimed at collecting for refugees among the LGBT+ community, collected £1,805 through crowdfunding and collections at Pride events.

The most successful collections were at

Birmingham and Norwich Prides where local comrades had mobilised support through Stand Up To Racism and trade union contacts

This year we were able to have a serious intervention in half a dozen Prides, thanks to the involvement of a layer of newer comrades. We have also attracted interest in the group LGBT+ Against Islamophobia.

This initiative grew out of a meeting with members of the original Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, including our comrade Nicola Field, in early 2015.

It took off following a statement in response to the ramping up of Islamophobia around the Prevent strategy.

The statement 'Why LGBT+ people say no to Islamophobia' attracted a wide range of signatures from the LGBT+ and trade union movements and saw the number of 'likes' on the Facebook page rise to nearly 2,000.

The banner was also prominent on the vigil after the attack on an LGBT+ nightclub in Orlando. Outside London similar groups have been set up and taken their banners to Prides and anti-racist events.

It is important that these groups work closely with Stand Up To Racism so that they help to pull LGBT+ people into local SUTR networks.

The spike in racist attacks post-Brexit has been accompanied by a 147% increase in attacks on LGBT+ people, according to police figures.

This gives the lie to any pretence that attacks on foreigners are justified in the name of protecting progressive 'British values' such as support for LGBT+ people.

In reality opening the door to bigotry and oppression of one group of people gives confidence to bigots of every hue to spout their filth more openly.

Just as both sides in the EU debate were happy to attack immigrants, so neither side can claim the moral high ground over LGBT+ rights.

The Brexit vote came in as the TUC LGBT+ Conference was in progress, and was met with tears by many delegates who felt that being in the EU offered a measure of protection.

But a glance at France, Austria or Hungary where far right groups, often with support from the Catholic Church, are winning votes on the back of support for the nuclear family alongside attacks on immigrants shows us that rights can be lost as well as won and are certainly not dependent on membership of the EU.

A much better model for fighting oppression comes from the women of Poland who fought off a grave attack on their (already limited) right to abortion. As with racism, we should oppose any attempt to blame all Leave voters for the rise in attacks on LGBT+ people.

The rise in the visibility of people identifying as trans, queer, non-binary, gender fluid and so on continues.

According to YouGov, young people are increasingly likely to identify their sexuality

as being somewhere between 100% homosexual and 100% heterosexual (around half of 18-24 year olds). There is an increasing openness to accepting both gender and sexuality as existing on a spectrum.

Clearly the persistence of bullying at school and attacks on LGBT+ people – particularly trans women – show that this is not the same as general acceptance within society.

But it does mean that many young people, especially on campuses, are confidently asserting their sexual and gender identities and demanding to be accepted. This has meant not just arguments about gender neutral toilets, but clashes between some feminists and trans women.

There will be variations on these arguments, from what have become known as Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) who refuse to accept trans women as women to a more nuanced position.

Germaine Greer for example declared last year that ‘you can’t just lop your dick off and wear a dress and call yourself a fucking woman’. Such comments are clearly deeply offensive.

But she more recently appeared to back-track from this position, admitting that it wasn’t so simple to define a man and a woman, but then went on to say it “wasn’t fair” that “a man who has lived for 40 years as a man and had children with a woman and enjoyed the services – the unpaid services of a wife, which most women will never know... then decides that the whole time he’s been a woman.”

This latter comment is very revealing in that it shows the link with privilege theory.

The problem for many feminists is that people assigned male at birth (AMAB and AFAB are acronyms now commonly in use) have benefitted from the oppression of women and either have a vestigial interest in maintaining it and/or are unable to leave behind them the habits they have acquired in their privileged role.

Some feminists, and this has opened up inside the National Union of Teachers for example, adopt a softer version of this opposition to self-identification through fear of women’s spaces being dominated by trans women.

Our starting point here should be to recognise that trans and non-trans (the term often used is cis, though this is often used in a disparaging manner by proponents of privilege theory) women suffer from oppression, and that the most effective way to overcome this is to unite against those who really do benefit from all of our oppression i.e. the ruling class.

We are for the right of trans women to be accepted unconditionally as women. But women who actively oppose oppression and call themselves feminists are not the main enemy. We don’t agree with their analysis of oppression but we do want to fight alongside them. This means we should not simply dismiss their arguments; these are complex issues which are still evolving.

We certainly do not support the no-plat-

forming of people who generally want to fight oppression but hold some backward ideas.

‘No platform’ is a specific form of protest aimed at stopping fascists. This is because fascists are not simply people who say nasty things – they want to smash all forms of democracy including any working class organisation.

Giving them a platform results in a rise in physical attacks on vulnerable groups as well as left-wing and trade union organisations. That is why we want to stop them speaking and would not share a platform with them or debate them.

These arguments do not apply to people like Germaine Greer or Peter Tatchell, however much we may disagree with them.

Abusing no-platform in this way opens the door to all sorts of groups or individuals being banned for expressing opinions which we would want debated in the open.

Many of the arguments that our younger LGBT+ comrades are coming across are relatively new and often complex.

They have lessons for any comrade involved in campaigns against oppression and having to take up questions around intersectionality and privilege theory.

We hope to organise an educational event to cover the debates around trans politics before the end of the year, and will continue to expand on these issues in our publications.

At last year’s Conference we passed a document with the following suggestions for action at the end:

- Comrades who identify as LGBT+ should be encouraged to intervene in their union’s LGBT+ structures and campaigns. This includes standing for union LGBT+ conferences and committees.
- All comrades, regardless of their sexuality, should feel encouraged to intervene in local LGBT+ activism. The party will use Party Notes to build LGBT+ work on an ongoing basis, especially highlighting caucus meetings to comrades. Caucus meetings are open to all who are interested in ideas and activity in this area.
- The party and the caucus encourage and will support comrades taking part in united front work around LGBT+ issues. For instance, intervening and taking part in local/regional queer/LGBT+ political initiatives. We can develop our political capacity in this area and build political relationships through this work. We should always take copies of the Pride, Politics and Protest pamphlet to these events, as well as papers.
- LGBT+ History Month, which takes place in February, is now a focus for many unions. But it is an area that needs developing and party members can work to highlight the profile of the event to show that we are the best fighters on the issue.

A recent survey in the NUT showed

that only 7% of schools recognised the event in any way. Initiating or playing a lead role in celebrating LGBT+ History Month is a chance for comrades, LGBT+ or not, to be ‘a tribune of the oppressed’ and win respect for linking issues of class and oppression in their workplace.

SWP members can therefore create and intervene in LGBT+ History Month events, confidently putting forward and developing a material analysis of sexual oppression, at the same time as learning and understanding about the ways in which young people now integrate sexual identity issues into their everyday lives, regardless of their own sexual preferences.

We think it is important to continue to build along these lines, with the important addition that building Stand Up To Racism needs to be as central to our LGBT+ work as it is to other areas of SWP activity.

The success of LGBT+ Against Islamophobia shows that there is the potential amongst young LGBT+ activists to be won to being part of a mass anti-racist movement.

It is also worth noting that meetings around Nicola’s re-published book ‘Over the Rainbow’ have attracted young and old activists alike, and all comrades should be encouraged to read and use this book which explores the relationship between class and LGBT+ oppression in an accessible way.

Finally, it is vital that, as with all new members, we fight to involve our newer LGBT+ comrades in all areas of Party activity. This means taking time and effort to involve them in branch meetings and paper sales and thinking about what they are reading.

The pull towards single issue activism, or towards Corbyn’s Labour Party, can be particularly strong but the breadth of our politics and activism are a powerful antidote.

POLITICAL EDUCATION AND THE PARTY

Fran (Brixton)

The Socialist Workers Party stands in the proud tradition of amalgamating both theory and practice. We are not a talking shop; neither do we throw our members into one campaign after another without providing the space to unpick the theoretical implications of each area of our work.

Such spaces were for an extended period provided by weekly branch meetings, the bi-annual party councils, the annual conference and the annual Marxism festival.

More recently there has been a flourishing of initiatives aimed at deepening the understanding, particularly that held by

new members, of the core tenets of international socialism.

Within the party these have included district educationals; nationwide educationals aimed at young and new members; and over the past year, a Capital reading group and a Young Members Caucus in London.

Additionally, the number of speakers using visual aids, video clips, props and other multimedia content to enhance the educational benefit of their meetings has increased over the past few years.

The importance of such developments cannot be overstated: political education is vital to the continuation of the party for three reasons.

Firstly, it prepares our members for the arguments they are likely to come across in our united front work, equipping them with the ideological tools necessary to intervene constructively in those arguments and recruit new layers in the process.

Secondly, it provides members with an understanding of each area of our work as part of a bigger picture, increasing the capacity for shared perspectives on political priorities and, in turn, reducing frequency and severity of splits.

These two points make it clear how, without adequate political education of our members, united front work can act as a bridge out of the party; and why social ties cannot serve as a substitute for this.

Finally, political education enables members to participate fully in the democracy of the organisation, taking informed positions on the political disagreements which are bound to arise in a healthy organisation and fulfilling their potential by contributing ideas of their own to drive the organisation forward in this most exciting period.

Additionally, it should be clear that with an older layer of comrades who have a wealth of knowledge and experience, education which passes on that knowledge to new members is surely an economical method for rejuvenating the organisation.

One of the largest fractions in the SWP is our NUT fraction. Alongside our UCU comrades, this means the party possesses a vast pool of knowledge on educational practices which is currently not being tapped into.

Below I have listed some suggestions for improving the educational aspect of different party events which are intended to be viewed not as finished products, but as the starting point for a discussion among comrades with a background in education.

Our standard meeting format

Though very welcome, the one shortfall shared by the vast majority of the new initiatives listed above is that they continue to be held in the same format as branch meetings.

This format – speaker introduction, contributions from floor, speaker summation – is a good format for facilitating a polemic,

or for ensuring that a range of perspectives are heard by all in attendance.

This is ideal for public events where those in attendance hold a wide range of opinions on the discussion topic; or where attendees have a range of different experiences, for example at party councils and conferences.

Contributions will naturally tend towards being pre-formulated in this format, and to present themselves as the finished product – the final and fixed opinion of the contributor on that topic. Most notably, it allows an argument to be ‘won’.

The trade-off is that the debate is less accessible for those with a lower level of either knowledge, political experience or confidence. Not only are these people less likely to contribute, they are also likely to take in less of the educational content as they are not actively participating in the meeting and therefore their focus is necessarily reduced.

Of course it is the case that this trade-off is necessary at times, but there are some ways that it can be overcome to an extent. Though some of the methods listed here are already used in the party, they must be implemented far more systematically at the level of branches if we are to retain and develop new cadre within the branches.

Firstly, as is most common practice, more experienced members can encourage newer members to plan contributions prior to meetings.

Secondly, it is widely acknowledged that visual aids enhance educational benefits for all learners, particularly those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs.

As mentioned above, the use of this practice within the party is increasing and all members should reflect on ways they could incorporate them into their own meetings that they give for branches.

The result will of course be very different for different topics. Videos and audio clips (eg from speeches, footage of events or music) and powerpoint slides of key information are effective, though do require an iPad for smaller meetings and the use of a projector for larger ones.

Alternatively posters or print outs of images, and even pre-drawn flow charts or sketches can help enhance the educational benefit of a meeting.

Finally, branch meetings could incorporate the use of ‘talk partners’, either immediately after the speaker introduction, or at 2 or 3 intervals during the discussion section. This would involve the chair asking participants at the meeting to discuss a particular question with the person next to them for a given period of time, for example 2 or 3 minutes (there is some detail below regarding which types of questions are appropriate for prompting discussion). This question would then serve as a basis for the whole group discussion.

Newer members in particular are likely to feel more confident when expressing their ideas in a paired situation, rather

than to the whole group, where the fear of saying something that is incorrect can restrict their participation and, in turn, their learning.

The shared responsibility for an opinion or view which can come with this strategy raises self-confidence and encourages engagement, as well as giving participants time to think and formulate contributions for the whole group discussion.

All the research shows that when both speaking and listening is well developed and encouraged, there is a positive effect on learning.

Educational sessions

For sessions with a solely educational purpose, a different format should be used to overcome the unevenness in confidence, experience and knowledge among those present, and to allow them to explore ideas aloud rather than feel pressured into presenting a finalised opinion.

One such format can involve breaking into small groups of 3 or 4 to discuss set questions following the speaker’s introduction.

Serious thought must also go into which questions are asked and how they should be posed. Closed questions (ie those which could have a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer) are likely to reproduce the same environment as current branch meetings: closed questioning is generally used to gain easy and quick answers and to ascertain facts, and it keeps control of the discussion with the questioner.

If we want newer members to think and reflect more on the topic and to express their opinions more openly, we need to be using open-ended questioning.

Open-ended questions hand control of the discussion to respondents – ie, the learners are encouraged to take control of their own learning.

Combined with the high level of interaction engendered by small group discussions, the use of such questioning will greatly increase the amount of information retained from sessions, in line with the amount of time spent actively participating.

As stated in my IB contribution in 2014 on building in Kingston: ‘the educationals which took place in 2011-12 were invaluable in producing a core of ideologically hardened cadre’.

The West London educationals involved breaking down into small groups to discuss a small number of questions which were listed on a sheet of paper, with space below each question for notes. The roles of timekeeper and scribe would be covered by people in the group. Most importantly, the questions were open-ended, and often scenario based.

Scenario-based questions can help to prepare comrades for arguments they are likely to encounter in the movement, as well as to unpick the ideological tenets of rival traditions.

For example, asking comrades how they

would respond if a Labour party member in a united front asked them to join the Labour party to deselect rightwing MPs would enable them to prepare for this possibility, and to discuss the ideology of Labourism.

Questions can also raise scenarios which are not a distinct possibility, but instead enable comrades to develop an understanding of an aspect of the current period as part of a historical process.

For example, asking comrades what action they would take if there was a revolutionary situation in their country, but their group had very few members (as in the case of the Egyptian revolution) enabled comrades to discuss the nature and historical development of the SWP.

The setting of such questions requires collaboration from the speaker and the chair prior to events, and involves an element of political forecasting as well as careful consideration of how best to draw out ideological debates.

Reading groups

Finally, a note on reading groups: these are often difficult to organise and to maintain as many comrades will find it difficult to commit to the reading from one session to the next.

The educational benefit of a reading group is of course greatly increased if its participants complete reading between sessions. However, it is possible to conduct reading of short texts and material within sessions, and to carry out the discussion immediately after. In fact, such a model is used in parts of education and is termed a 'text-based discussion'.

There is no reason why, particularly for new comrades, such reading groups couldn't be conducted with the guidance of one or two more experienced members.

These could look at short extracts from Marxist literature, parts of the educational pamphlets, Socialist Review articles and even extended Socialist Worker articles.

Although the educational benefit would be reduced, so would the threshold for involvement, allowing more of our members to participate in reading groups and increase their theoretical knowledge.

This would develop their confidence in their own ability to read and understand Marxist literature and (hopefully) impart an enthusiasm for reading such material.

A party of leaders

As stated at the beginning, our tradition seeks to incorporate both theory and practice. Developing members' understanding of Marxist theory is crucial, though it can never serve as a replacement for their involvement in the struggle, whether in their trade unions or united fronts on campuses and in communities.

However, a good Marxist education supports and enhances this involvement.

If we implement it correctly, we can

provide comrades with the theoretical underpinnings necessary to lead in their struggles, responding confidently to the spontaneous developments which occur and inspiring those they work alongside to the cause of revolutionary socialism from below.

DOWN WITH DOING AS YOU FEEL

Adam (Harlow)

Perhaps I have not been paying enough attention to party matters recently. It appears I missed our transformation into a loose automatist formation. Indeed, there can be no other explanation for the behaviour of some comrades regarding the EU referendum.

As a democratic centralist organisation, after our period of pre-conference debate on a particular issue we take a vote and such a decision is binding. See for example the party's constitution²² which makes clear that:

In order to be effective in both carrying out the party's democratic decisions and testing them in practice, we need to act in a unified way. Once decisions have been taken, all members are expected to carry out party policies.

Decisions by the Conference of the SWP are binding on all party members and bodies.

After a detailed and protracted debate in the lead up to January's Conference, we voted on the party's position in relation to the EU Referendum. "Conference voted overwhelmingly to support a left-wing, internationalist, anti-racist vote to leave in the EU referendum²³."

This was as I understood it, an unambiguous instruction to the party to campaign, on a left-wing basis, to leave the EU.

However, some comrades felt that this didn't apply to them. Whether it was posts on social media, letters into Socialist Worker or the vote itself, some comrades were clearly supporting a vote to remain.

The pinnacle (or depth) of this neo-anarchism came during this year's Marxism Festival. A longstanding comrade stood up in Logan Hall and delivered a contribution detailing why he decided to vote to Remain in the EU.

Perhaps there were certain comrades who found themselves in a unique position whereby it was simply impossible to campaign for a leave vote. However, if this was the case then surely comrades could have the self-consciousness and respect for

the party that they broke discipline quietly. Breaking party discipline is not something to be boasted about in Logan Hall.

It is worth briefly looking at why we endorse democratic centralism and why it is so important. This is not a system dreamt up by Charlie Kimber one sunny day. There is historical precedent based on the lessons learned by the Russian revolutionaries. The following passage from Lenin's article²⁴ on party discipline is pertinent.

"We defined it as: unity of action, freedom of discussion and criticism.

Only such discipline is worthy of the democratic party of the advanced class. The strength of the working class lies in organisation. Unless the masses are organised, the proletariat is nothing. Organised—it is everything. Organisation means unity of action, unity in practical operations.

After the competent bodies have decided, all of us, as members of the Party, must act as one man. A Bolshevik in Odessa must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing a Cadet's name even if it sickens him. And a Menshevik in Moscow must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing only the names of Social-Democrats, even if his soul is yearning for the Cadets."

It is such tight organisation and our unity in action that has allowed us to "punch above our weight". This is something that even our critics acknowledge. We are by no means a mass party but our strength comes from the fact that we concentrate our forces and all our members push in the same direction.

In the quote above, Lenin is emphasising party discipline during a bitter internal battle over whether to allow blocs with the Cadets. Nevertheless, he made clear that once the decision was made, a party member was expected to act accordingly "even if it sickens him²⁵".

Conference decisions are not a buffet whereby party members can pick the ones they like and ignore others as they wish. Democratic centralism means that all conference decisions are to be respected. Would comrades find it acceptable if union members crossed picket lines because they didn't agree with the decision to strike on that certain occasion?

At conference, members agreed that supporting a leave vote was going to be a difficult position to take. It is also true that some comrades suffered abuse because of our position. Liberal hypocrites whose record on anti-racism does not compare to ours lined up to kick us.

I even know of a comrade who was removed as a trustee from a migrant charity because of our support for a leave vote. But we suffered *together*, we argued our position *together* and we defended the party's

²² Socialist Worker's Party Constitution section (1) [this can be found at the bottom of the first pre-conference bulletin]

²³ Socialist Worker 12 Jan 2016

²⁴ Lenin: Party Discipline and the Fight Against the Pro-Cadet Social Democrats (1906)

²⁵ *ibid*

proud record on anti-racism *together*.

I personally feel that we were right to argue for a leave vote but we are now in the pre-conference period and comrades have a chance to challenge our decision. However, one of the reasons that it is important to maintain discipline is precisely to assist the reflection after the event. How can comrades expect to have weight given to their criticisms of the line if they were not seen to have been towing it? How can comrades talk about the difficulties in the arguments for a leave vote if they weren't actually arguing for it?

We need the party structures to make a conscious attempt to remind comrades of what democratic centralism is and why it is important. Perhaps a dayschool for new members (and those who have forgotten) would be useful.

We remain in a level of low struggle but this is temporary. As we enter more turbulent times the need for party discipline will be ever greater. We will face greater challenges than sneers from dishonest Guardian readers. We need to fight now to strengthen our party, we need to fight for a disciplined party, a party worthy of the working class, a party for revolution.

Yes to party discipline
Yes to organisation
Yes to punching above our weight
Down with doing as you feel

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: A BRIEF MARXIST CRITIQUE

Chris (Kingston)

There is a growing mood of opposition to racism among students and young people. Often the first arguments people will come across regarding racism will be through social media and academia in which privilege theory is the 'common sense'. Terms like 'white supremacy', 'micro-aggression' and 'cultural appropriation' have gained in popularity, as well as a particular focus on cultural issues.

The term 'cultural appropriation' came to prominence in opposition to the stereotypical wearing of First Nation ("Native American") headdresses at festivals in the US and Canada.

The concept was subsequently used in heated debates around music, for example criticism of the white rapper Iggy Azalea's perceived lack of respect for the roots of hip hop. The term commonly refers to the use of an oppressed group's culture by members of the dominant culture of a society. It covers three instances:

- 1) Oppressive and stereotypical use of an oppressed group's culture.
- 2) Commercialisation. The use of an oppressed group's culture which ignores the context or origins of a cultural item or religious practice and is repackaged for profit. The profit going to those that are not from the oppressed group.
- 3) Multiculturalism. The mixing and evolution of cultures as well as the taking up of an oppressed group's culture as an act of solidarity.

The concept of 'cultural appropriation' is bound up with the idea that cultures are static. 'White culture' or 'Black culture' are spoken of as homogenous, unchanging and without class differentiation.

It downplays the fact that cultures are a hybrid mixture of influences. The term grows out of the idea that non-oppressed groups benefit from the oppression of others. For example the term is often used in tandem with the idea that we live in a white supremacist society that benefits all white people – regardless of whether they are anti-racists or their class position.

Cultural appreciation vs cultural appropriation

The term 'cultural appreciation' has been developed as a way to define situations when it's acceptable to partake in an oppressed group's culture.

Generally this is a situation when members of the oppressed group are around or specific religious or cultural events. Also if a member of the oppressed group profits.

This is not a solution, as Fred Hampton said "you don't replace capitalism with black capitalism". Further this does not represent many working class people's lives. Using both terms does not address the problems with the central ideas behind appropriation either.

Multiculturalism from below

We celebrate multiculturalism from below. This includes the mixing of cultures through everyday working class life as well as the mixing of cultures borne out through collective struggle.

The concept of Cultural Appropriation is not necessary to challenge the racist use or commercialisation of oppressed people's culture. It is linked to the strategy of privilege theory which amounts to non-oppressed people "checking their privilege" and acknowledging they benefit from the oppression of others.

This is not an accurate interpretation of how oppression works. It also means that political action ends at the individual. While we should challenge individual oppressive behaviour, oppression is structural discrimination created or reinvigorated by the ruling class to

divide the working class.

Revolutionaries fight all forms of oppression in the here and now while acknowledging that only socialism will create the material basis for the eradication of all oppression.

Things we can do

- Adopt the united front method to work with those who hold ideas around privilege theory fraternally arguing for revolutionary politics. Privilege theory is the 'common sense' on campus among activists. We have to work with people who have these ideas.
- Take up debates and campaigns around cultural issues more quickly and systematically.
- Discuss these issues more frequently in our publications.
- Arm our new and long standing members with the arguments to take up debates around privilege theory and the specific concepts that go with it (white supremacy, micro-aggressions, cultural appropriation etc).

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE LATEST HOUSING ACT IS BREAKING NEW GROUND

Eileen (Tower Hamlets)

Cameron's Tories rammed through the Act as part of their onslaught against the post war welfare gains (alongside education, health and benefits).

The Housing and Planning Act, if implemented, would impose means testing and higher rents, sell off 350,000 of the most valued council homes on the open market and further undermine council house funding in the process, sell starter homes (at up to £450,000 after subsidy), instead of any other new 'affordable' housing for rent.

It will speed up developers' taking over public land, through a 'brownfield register' and further privatise planning controls. However, it will do nothing on the urgent issues of rent control, security for private renters, and building new council housing.

This threat is not yet happening because the Act has not been enforced. May's Tories are stalling, I assume because of splits and fears of the widening opposition.

Meanwhile Corbyn has promised to build 500,000 new council homes, and Labour conference voted to campaign against the Housing Act and support repeal.

Opposition to the Act is still modest in scale, but is drawing in tenants and housing campaigners of all tenures, trade unions at

the top and the base, and political groups including Momentum and several Labour and Green councillors. It also connects with new layers of radical, often young, people grappling with how to win change.

We have played a central part in shaping and steering this as a broad united campaign. It's by no means perfect, but does show that working consistently and consciously on the SWP's model of a united front, has helped a small number of us root into areas of resistance and connect with wider radicalising forces.

The SWP has a good history in housing struggles. I don't have the full story but it includes the fight against the 1972 Housing Finance Act, the 1980s Poll Tax, against council house privatisation from 1997, and the anti Bedroom Tax campaign.

We have developed a way of working that is broad and united, while maintaining independence and tenant leadership despite a shrinking tenant movement.

If there's comrades taking part in tenant and housing campaigns, or housing issues coming up near you, there's back up through our housing caucus and a lot of experience.

HOW TO CONNECT PEOPLE: TECHNOLOGY GOOD, PERSONAL APPROACH BETTER

Jon (Portsmouth)

Does this sound familiar? Quite a small pool of socialists and trade union activists in slightly different combinations form the overwhelming majority of all the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War, trade union, Labour Party, Momentum and SWP meetings in the locality.

If so, how do we break out and get some new blood involved? I think there are two main methods in the present period.

1) United front work campaigning against racism. Specifically but not exclusively Stand Up To Racism

2) Party activity that identifies new people who want to get involved, specifically campaigning sales of Socialist Worker.

Of course there are other things we should and need to do such as individual, Socialist Worker sales, work in trade unions and in united front campaigns where the focus is not anti-racism. However at time of very low industrial struggle, political polarisation and increasing racism these areas of work will not be the most efficient way to make contact with new people.

Stand Up To Racism

I don't need to repeat the arguments from the Central Committee in IB1 about the central importance of SUTR. I agree with them. We need to recognise how successful SUTR has been and use this success to establish broad based ongoing campaigns across the country.

That speakers with quite different politics from the SWP are so willing to change prior commitments so they can speak at SUTR public meetings shows just how much potential there is. We have to think big and act quickly to establish SUTR everywhere we can.

Through our work helping to build SUTR we will meet new people and develop a political relationship with them. The main objective is to help unite the working class against racism. A strong SWP as part of much wider united front is what we should be aiming for. This means we should not hold back from asking those involved in SUTR to also get involved in the SWP.

While SUTR is the priority, it is important to note that every time we have mobilised against the fascists we meet new people who want to get involved in the SUTR and the SWP if we intervene effectively.

The unconnected Corbyn supporters

Where SWP activity reaches out we keep finding people who are not yet engaged in political activity but who want to. This should come as no surprise in the era of Corbyn and mass membership of the Labour Party. Corbyn's influence goes beyond the huge numbers of people who have joined the Labour Party.

When I suggested in July at an NUT strike rally that we should do a mass 'Support Corbyn' selfie a lot of the strikers responded. The NUT is not affiliated to the Labour Party and most of the teachers who joined the photo do not attend political meetings.

The vast majority of people who like and support Jeremy Corbyn will not be at Labour Party of Momentum meetings. We should be at these meetings selling the paper and discussing joint activity. But if we only do this we miss the unconnected people who are influenced by Corbyn and the ideas he stands for. Our job is to connect to them.

Flagship Socialist Workers sales

This is not an easy task. The unconnected Corbyn supporters are a very large group of people and we are small party. Our flagship Socialist Worker sales do bring us into contact with some of these people, particularly when we are vigorously campaigning to defend refugees.

Where we use megaphones, posters, have a stall with pamphlets, leaflets and where we are willing to take on the racist arguments we inevitably encounter, we act as a pole of attraction for those who want to fight back. We meet people who like and respect what we do.

Some of the best people we meet are when the sales are low and racist comments are high. People see us making a stand often want to keep in touch with us. Some will get involved by coming to branch meetings, provided they are interesting and welcoming. Some will also get involved in SUTR if we encourage them and tell them how. We need to find out what they are interested in doing and help them get involved.

Some thoughts about establishing contact with people

1) Don't rely on emails lists to get people involved. They are worth doing but even assuming you can read the email address accurately Mail Chimp tells me that less than 20% of my mass emails are opened.

I point this out to comrades after they tell me they had a really good discussion with someone and their only means of contact is their email address.

I thought it would be useful to mention this before we see the next potential recruit wander off down the high street with the SWP having no way of ever contacting them again.

2) Social media suffers from the same problem of overload. Lots of us can't keep up with our emails at work or social media at home. Don't get me wrong. Social media is very important. It's great at keeping in contact and involving people who are already known to each other. But it tends to preach to the converted. It is not so good at establishing contact with new people unless you have the time to send individual messages.

3) In Portsmouth we sometimes do get people who turn up out of the blue at branch meeting after getting my emails for years but it is much better to ask for a mobile number and addresses. An ideal way is to use the SWP membership form, even if it for information only initially.

4) There really is no substitute for arranging to go for a coffee, to drop the paper round, arranging to go to the branch meeting together or exchanging texts to discuss Marxism.

Combined branch development

To improve how effective we are when we meet new people, we need to develop a high level of political understanding in our members and encourage them to participate in branch activity.

The arguments we encounter when we meet new people are often sophisticated and test us. Branch meetings, educationals and reading the party's publications equip us to deal with these arguments. Branch committees help us coordinate, plan and keep up the quality of our activity.

We need to make the most of opportunities that come our way, shape them and create new ones. This is how we can build the party and strengthen working class resistance to racism.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ELECTION 2016

Every year at SWP annual conference delegates elect a National Committee of 50 members.

Its role is set out in section six of the party's constitution (which is in this bulletin). Those elected to the NC also attend Party Councils and Party Conference by right.

We call for nominations for the NC in pre-conference bulletins 1 and 2. **All nominations must be received by 5pm on Monday 5 December.**

Please do not wait to the last

minute to do this.

A full list of nominations will be published in advance. This will give delegates time to decide who they wish to elect.

Below is the nomination form. If you wish to stand, please fill it in and return it to the national office, or email the required information to conference@swp.org.uk

Each nomination has to be supported by five comrades, and the nominee has to agree to be nominated.

Candidates have to be registered

members of the SWP and up to date with their subs (this also applies to the comrades nominating the candidate).

Each candidate should submit up to 50 words explaining why they should be on the NC. Please do not submit more than 50 words (last year the longest one submitted was 112 words – it had to be cut).

At conference, the CC, fractions, student committee and districts can submit lists of recommended candidates to conference delegates.

Nominee

Branch.....

Nominated by

1

2

3

4

5

Please give a brief outline of why you should be on the NC (no more than 50 words)

.....

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.....

.....

.....

.....

Please return this form to: NC nominations, PO Box 71327, London SE11 9BW.
Or email the required information to: conference@swp.org.uk